FORMALISM AND THE FALL OF THE ART WORLD
JED PERL

THE IRAQ WARS
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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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AMERICAN IDLE

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A JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND THE ARTS

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CORRESPONDENCE

INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

IT IS UNFORTUNATE THAT, FOR OVER 40 years, Martin Peretz has not understood, and has apparently made no effort to understand, the Episcopal Church ("Bad English," July 11 & 18). His article is filled with innumerable errors of both theology and fact. In the interest of space, let me address just three. First and foremost, it is painful for us to read his conclusion that the Episcopal Church and Episcopalians are anti-Semitic. We have long abhorred and continue to oppose any form of anti-Semitism. We greatly value our relationships with the American Jewish community and are currently engaged in a productive national Jewish-Christian dialogue. And we have a record of working with the Jewish community on social justice issues. The fact that we have serious disagreements with certain actions of the Israeli government should no more bring a charge of anti-Semitism than our disagreements with our own government should lead people to conclude Episcopalians are anti-American. Second, the Episcopal Church does not have a position on divestment. We are undergoing a process of discernment as to what actions (including corporate dialogues and shareholder resolutions) might be appropriate with, on the one hand, companies that contribute to the infrastructure of Israel's ongoing occupation of the West Bank and, on the other, companies that have connections to organizations responsible for violence against Israel. Third, it is presumptuous and even outrageous of Peretz to assert the baseless charge that Palestinian Christians don't want to live in a Palestinian state.

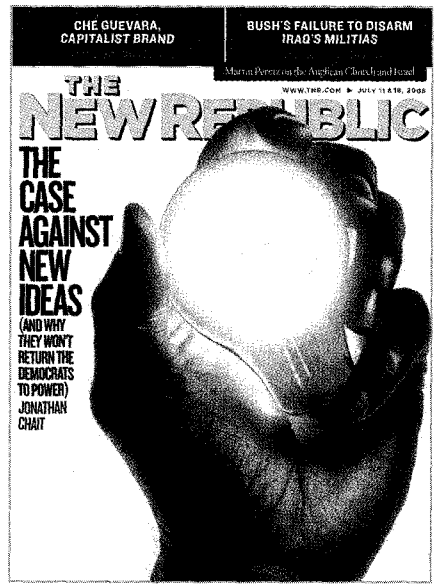
We have long supported a two-state solution in which Israelis and Palestinians can live side by side in peace with secure borders. There will be many views as to how that can best be achieved, but disagreements should be based on facts, not erroneous charges that only undermine the serious work that needs to be done.

C. CHRISTOPHER EPTING
Bishop, Deputy for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations
The Episcopal Church in the USA
New York, New York

AS ANTHONY TROLLOPE DEMONstrated so delightfully in his novels, the Anglican Church is a pretty risible outfit, and I certainly agree with Peretz when he scores that peculiar ecclesiastical body for its latest foray into politically correct geopolitics. But I think he overreaches when he accuses the Church of hostility against Israel because of ancient Christian polemics against Judaism. After all, one cannot have a theological animus without theology; and, as Peretz showed, the Anglicans have almost none at all. I suspect that Anglicans' vulgar, pseudo-prophetic witness in support of a possible boycott against companies that do business with Israel is but one more sign of their hopeless hankering for approval from the secular left, whose enmity against Israel (which has now broken out into outright anti-Semitism) can hardly be said to have Christian roots, since it tolerates Christians only when they serve as "useful idiots." I admit, when Presbyterian and Anglican Church bodies indulge in such fatuous politics, they deserve criticism. But, in this instance, they deserve criticism because they are whoring after secular gods, not because they are harkening to Christian Scriptures.

EDWARD T. OAKES
Society of Jesus
University of St. Mary of the Lake
Mundelein, Illinois

PERETZ DISPLAYS AN UNJUSTIFIED oversensitivity to anti-Semitism in his accusations of Anglican and Presbyterian bigotry. As a liberal Presbyterian and longtime supporter of Israel's right to defend itself, I am all too aware of my Church's misguided decision on divestment. But we should not make the mistake of confusing naïveté with prejudice.


CHE GUEVARA, CAPITALIST BRAND
BUSH'S FAILURE TO DISARM IRAQ'S MILITIAS
Martin Peretz on the Anglican Church In and Israel
THE NEW REPUBLIC
THE CASE AGAINST NEW IDEAS
(AND WHY THEY WON'T RETURN THE DEMOCRATS TO POWER)
JONATHAN CHAIT

As a Jew, Peretz sees this conflict from the inside. His frustration is understandable. But, in his inability to properly decipher the beliefs of his ideological foes, he makes the same mistake as those he decries. And, in the end, Peretz's failure to understand their motivations says more about his own biases than those of divestment supporters.

MARC WILSON
Conyers, Georgia

PERETZ IS CERTAINLY CORRECT THAT Anglican divestment from Israel is a ham-handed solution to a complex problem, especially in its oversight of the ineptitude, cowardice, and corruption that has prevented the Palestinian leadership from negotiating a reasonable end to Israeli occupation. He may even be correct to claim that leaders of the Anglican Church are motivated more by "ancient" anti-Jewish bigotry than they are by a genuine desire to end the oppression of Palestine.

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But I take my leave of Peretz when he paints an Arab world that deserves to be crushed underfoot. The Anglican Church cannot possibly sympathize, he claims, with a Palestinian society that holds "little or nothing" that would "fill a progressive with enthusiasm." This misses the point. Indignation over impingements upon the human rights of any oppressed group is the progressive's stock in trade. To dismiss this indignation is to diminish the humanity of an oppressed group. That Palestinian culture, and Arab culture more broadly, is widely infected with retrograde and repugnant religious fundamentalism is undeniable. That this renders Israel's actions above reproach is the position of a narrow-minded partisan.

It would seem that the Anglican Church is not alone in its clumsy interpretation of the Middle East conflict. The Anglican divines have succeeded, however, in holding a spotlight to Israeli occupation among those more concerned with security and antiterrorism than human rights abuses. If theirs is a useful idiocy, then it appears to have an advantage over other kinds.

FEISAL G. MOHAMED
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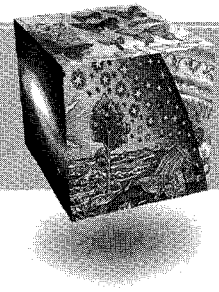
MARTIN PERETZ RESPONDS:

I respect and appreciate the liturgy of the Church, its dignity and seriousness and also the way many of its clerics deal with believers in personal stress. If C. Christopher Epting thinks that Palestinian Christians feel safe living under a Palestinian Muslim regime, he might ask those who left ancestral homes in Bethlehem, Beit Jala, and dozens of other communities why they abandoned the birthplace of Christianity. Edward T. Oakes is probably correct. Of course, Feisal G. Mohamed is pleased to have the Anglican Church scrutinize Israel and move against it. But the burden of support for a Palestinian state is how it will deal with its people. Alas, the evidence of most of the neighboring Arab states and of the parties and militias operating now in Palestinian society more than suggest that Palestine will be politically cruel, culturally intolerant, and socially backward. If Jesus were to approach that polity, he would weep. ■



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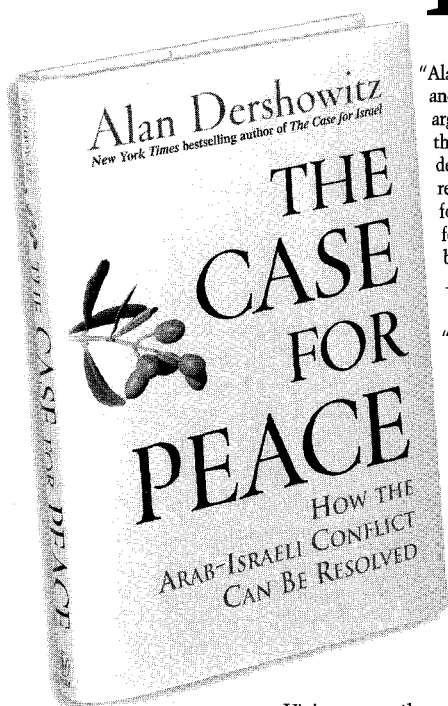
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Martial Flaw

TRB

FROM ANN ARBOR

From the day Cindy Sheehan, mother of a fallen American soldier, began her vigil in Crawford, Texas, President Bush left the job of attacking her to his henchmen in the Republican Party and his sycophants in the press. Instead, Bush has largely confined himself to one modest, respectful response: that Sheehan's opposition to the war in Iraq is a relatively lonely one within the military community. "I met with a lot of families," Bush explained at a late August press conference. "She doesn't represent the view of a lot of the families I have met with."

Bush may be right about that. Sheehan's appearance on the national scene doesn't prove that most military families oppose the war any more than it proves that immediately withdrawing soldiers, the policy she has advocated, is the one the United States should now pursue. But Sheehan's value isn't as a barometer of public opinion or as a source of foreign policy wisdom. It's as proof of one very simple point: that a person can criticize the war and still support the troops.

If that idea seems self-evident, then you haven't paid much attention to politics these past few years. Whenever Bush and his allies have faced rising opposition to some element of the Iraq war, they've tried to shut down the argument by suggesting that their critics are undermining the morale and safety of U.S. troops abroad—in effect, using American soldiers as human shields in a p.r. war. They did so most famously, and offensively, at the 2004 Republican National Convention, when an unhinged Zell Miller, the ostensibly Democratic senator from Georgia, accused Democrats of slandering the soldiers. "Democratic leaders see America as an occupier, not a liberator," Miller said. "And nothing makes this Marine madder than someone calling American troops occupiers rather than liberators." Republicans and their supporters launched similar rhetorical broadsides after rising insurgency activity in 2004 (when Representative Rob Portman said that criticizing Bush's leadership was "demoralizing" to the troops), after revelations this year about prisoner abuse in military detention facilities (when Deborah Pryce, another House Republican, attacked Democrats for "jumping at any chance to point the finger at our own troops"), and after a recent series of setbacks (when Oliver North lashed out at the "old, anti-military, 'Blame America First' crowd" for dwelling on them).

These arguments have resonated because many Americans believe that the Democratic Party, or at least its more left-leaning elements, is hostile toward the military. And they believe this because, not that long ago, it was at least partly true. During the Vietnam era, the left frequently attacked the nation's soldiers as well as its political leaders, calling them baby-killers and ostracizing them upon their return home. And, starting in the 1970s, many prominent Democrats called for reduced defense spending, solidifying the impression that they wanted to weaken the military as an institution.

But nobody in the respectable left is calling American soldiers baby-killers anymore—this, despite the fact that thousands of Iraqi civilians, many of them children, have in fact died because of the war. During the prison abuse scandal, the left directed its anger over the torture and humiliation of detainees squarely at the policymakers who allowed it to happen, not the frontline soldiers who carried it out. In Washington, the split between the military and Democrats flared up briefly in the early '90s, when President Clinton proposed allowing gays to serve openly in the Armed Forces. But, lately, when Democrats have been talking about military issues, it has been to castigate the president for not deploying more manpower and better equipment to Iraq—in effect, for doing to the military what critics said the Democrats were trying to do back in the 1980s.

Have Democrats just become more politically savvy? In some cases, perhaps. The constant proclamations of patriotism—like the loud "U.S.A." chants at last year's Democratic National Convention in Boston—can have a forced, obviously self-conscious quality about them. But some of the change is real. During the 1960s and early '70s, the military stood for all of the values—conformity to prevailing social attitudes, blind obedience to authority, et cetera—against which the left was staging a full-scale social revolution. That's a big reason why it became the object of such ire. Today's culture wars, which are largely about sex, religion, and the intersection of the two, simply haven't provoked the same kind of widespread upheaval. And, however contrived patriotism by the Democrats may seem, the fact remains that many prominent Democrats are decorated war heroes who convincingly speak the language of honor and who seem genuinely dismayed that the administration left U.S. troops so obviously unprepared for the task at hand.

That these shifts haven't registered fully in the national psyche is testimony, in part, to just how deep a scar the left's past contempt for the military created. It is also testimony to the way Bush and his allies have cleverly used the cultural distance between red and blue America to reinforce perceptions of liberal sentiment about American soldiers. But that's why people like Sheehan are so important. Critics can truthfully say that she doesn't understand foreign policy, that she hangs out with radicals, and that she espouses extremist views herself. But the one thing they cannot plausibly say is that she has contempt for American soldiers.

Indeed, the basic rationale for her appeal is to get the troops out of harm's way—to keep them from dying and to spare their families from grieving. And she's not the only one talking that way. Quite apart from the surprisingly strong candidacy of Paul Hackett, an Iraqi veteran who opposed the war and nearly won an Ohio congressional election last month, reports from the front lines suggest many soldiers have started expressing their own misgivings about the war's rationale, execution, and feasibility. Noting the difficulty of fighting an insurgency with strong civilian support, one Marine quoted in a recent story by Knight-Ridder's Tom Lasseter asked, "Why do I feel like I'm in a f------ Vietnam movie?" If our soldiers are asking these kinds of questions themselves, surely they don't mind if we keep asking them, too.

JONATHAN COH

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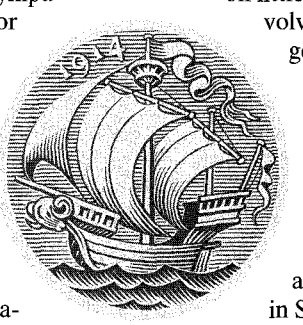
Articles of War

PRESIDENT BUSH HAILED the Iraqi constitution, unveiled last weekend, as "a document of which the Iraqis and the rest of the world can be proud." It isn't, and we shouldn't be. The reason has much to do with the constitution itself, riddled as it is with blatant and perhaps irreconcilable contradictions on such critical issues as federalism and the role of Islamic law. It is true that we cannot write a constitution for the Iraqis. It is also true that the Iraqi constitution need not be a perfect simulacrum of the U.S. Constitution. But cultural differences ought not obscure philosophical principles. When American soldiers are dying in the Iraqi struggle for equality, Americans will want equality in Iraq. Is this constitution the sort of document that the president had in mind when he committed the United States to the cause of Iraqi democracy? Almost certainly not.

But the problem with the constitution extends beyond the document itself and to the process that produced it. There is no gainsaying the fact—better, it is worth celebrating the fact—that even this process, which has heightened Iraq's sectarian divisions, still represents an epochal improvement over the darkness of the Saddam Hussein years. A closed society has been opened. That is the good news—and, for anybody who thought democratization a swift and pretty thing, the bad news. The opening of Iraq is precisely what is so alarming to so many Americans who may have been lulled by Bush's lyricism of liberation into forgetting that we have liberated the existing people of Iraq—and they now wish to express politically what Saddam prohibited: that is, themselves, in all the particularity and the virulence of their various identities. But, if these political expressions are illiberal or precursors to civil war, it will be bad news for us all.

Reconciling the interests of Shia, Kurdish, and Sunni factions in a new constitution was never going to be easy, especially after many Sunnis, to their own detriment, boycotted the January elections to the National Assembly. Indeed, the Sunnis have been guilty of immensely self-destructive behavior. Sunni negotiators increased the chances of civil war by rejecting the constitution outright, even though Shia and Kurdish drafters, after much cajoling by the United States, made significant concessions to Sunni demands. The Sunnis cannot be allowed a veto over the process—except that they may have one. It is difficult to sympathize with their nostalgia for a monopoly of power, but it is hard to imagine a functioning Iraqi democracy, however federal it may be, without genuine Sunni enfranchisement. Washington was right to push for more Sunni participation.



But the Bush administration, desperate for signs of progress amid growing antiwar sentiment at home, foolishly pressured Iraq's constitutional framers to stick to unrealistic and arbitrary deadlines. This encouraged Shia and Kurdish drafters to exclude Sunni representatives from the process during the final week of negotiations. It didn't help that, while the negotiations were ongoing, Shia government officials, most notably Ahmed Chalabi, were continuing to use Iraq's de-Baathification commission (a reasonable idea gone badly awry) to purge Sunnis from the government.

With sectarian violence on the rise throughout Iraq, the United States must do all it can to avert civil war. Unfortunately, our options are extremely limited. It is possible for the National Assembly to modify the constitution before it goes to a vote in October, and we should attempt to persuade Kurdish and Shia legislators to do so in a way that lures the Sunnis back to the table. This would probably require further concessions on federalism and de-Baathification. At the same time, the administration must use all means at its disposal to persuade Sunnis to vote for the constitution this October and—more importantly—to participate in December's elections for the legislature that will govern Iraq.

Iraqis of all stripes must be convinced that their future does not lie in armed struggle. This will be no mean feat. So, what can the United States do? The military could release more prisoners, thousands of whom it has detained on little evidence of direct involvement with the insurgency. The United States could offer Iraqi ministries more say over how reconstruction funding is spent, in return for ending the purge of Sunni officials. The administration must also do its utmost to rein in Shia and Kurdish militias, many of which are operating as anti-Sunni death squads. Finally, the United States should offer support to secular politicians running in the elections, for the sake of liberal democracy, and in the hope of boosting Sunni representation in the next parliament. All our military might notwithstanding, we will not decide Iraq's fate; but there are things that we must do—and quickly. ■

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NOTEBOOK

PLAN B COMPROMISE IGNORED . . . TIME TO JUNK THE COLLEGE BOARD

MALPRACTICE

LESTER CRAWFORD IS CERTAINLY A man of his word. His confirmation as FDA commissioner was secured in July with a promise that a decision on over-the-counter sale of the morning-after contraceptive Plan B would be made by September 1, placating senators who had become frustrated by the drug's delayed approval process. Sure enough, Crawford revealed last Friday that the FDA had taken "action" on Plan B—announcing that a ruling would be postponed indefinitely. An FDA spokesperson told *The Washington Post* that the commissioner was honoring his commitment to the deadline, but few were fooled. "A delay is not a decision," said Senator Patty Murray, who, along with Hillary Rodham Clinton, had initially blocked Crawford's confirmation. Susan Wood, director of the FDA's Office of Women's Health, resigned yesterday in protest over the Agency's continued foot-dragging.

The rationale for the no-decision decision gave further credence to critics who have accused the FDA of bowing to pressure from conservative groups. Though the Agency had determined that selling Plan B over the counter to women 17 and older was scientifically safe, Crawford said the FDA needed more time to sort through what he called "novel regulatory issues" and "profound" policy questions, such as how to keep younger girls from buying the pill without a prescription. We guess the new commissioner is unaware that the FDA previously approved the over-the-counter sale of nicotine gum to adults only and that stores routinely deal with minors attempting to purchase alcohol and cigarettes. The FDA might want to take some real action and call us in the morning.

SALEM ON THE POTOMAC

THE LAST TWO WEEKS HAVE BEEN busy ones over at the White House Office of Ideological Purity. The first intransigent career civil servant to get the axe was Lawrence A. Greenfeld, whom President Bush named in 2001 to lead the Bureau of Justice Statistics. According to *The New York Times*, he will be demoted to a lesser position at another agency after "he complained that senior political officials at the [Justice] department were seeking to play down newly compiled data on the aggressive police treatment of black and Hispanic drivers." In other words, the Bush administration was politicizing fact-finding. We're shocked. The *Times* went on to note that this move "caps more than three years of simmering tensions over charges of political interference at the agency. And it has stirred anger and tumult among many Justice Department statisticians, who say their independence in analyzing important law enforcement data has been compromised."

Lester Crawford

We hoped that this wouldn't prove to be a sign of ideological witch-hunting in the Bush administration. But, less than a week later, *The Washington Post* reported that Bunnatine H. Greenhouse, the Army Corps' top procurement official since 1997, had been "removed from the senior executive service, the top rank of civilian government employees." Greenhouse became known last year after she criticized the Pentagon's propensity for giving no-bid contracts to Halliburton, which, you may recall, is the company Vice President Dick Cheney once ran. "I can unequivocally state that the abuse related to contracts awarded to KBR [a Halliburton subsidiary] represents the most blatant and improper abuse I have witnessed," she stated in June. We are pleased that Cheney refrained from telling Greenhouse to commit an anatomically impossible act, as he did to Senator Pat Leahy after Leahy called for an investigation of the same issue. But, given Greenhouse's fate, that might have been preferable.

MATHEMATICAL ERROR

THIS WEEK, THE COLLEGE BOARD announced that, last year, the mean SAT math score was 520, a two-point increase from the previous year. Mean verbal scores, however, were unchanged at 508. This prompted Gaston Caperton, president of the College Board, to say that "we've got to keep our eye on literacy skills." So let's get this straight: A twelve-point difference (one or two questions at most) between an average high school student's verbal and math SAT scores means that we should start worrying about literacy skills? Several years ago, Bill Clinton called for a reevaluation of the way the United States teaches students quantitative skills, after hearing reports that twelfth-graders were being outperformed in physics and advanced math by those in roughly 20 other countries, including Latvia, Cyprus, and Greece. Don't

DAVID COWLES

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worry, though. That will all change once our slowly but surely increasing math SAT scores break 550!

Perhaps we should look at a better indicator of math achievement instead of a test taken mostly by high school juniors and seniors, which, according to the Princeton Review, relies almost exclusively on "concepts learned in the seventh or eighth grade." The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reported that, in 2003, American 15-year-olds stood on roughly equal ground with those in other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries regarding reading and verbal skills (in their respective languages). And, when it comes to math, we rank twenty-fourth of 29 countries studied by PISA. Perhaps the average student in any of the 23 countries ahead of us would easily break a 520 on the math SAT. Or perhaps we need to stop letting companies like the College Board have so much clout in telling educators how to better teach toward what many agree is a flawed test.

MOTHER OF ALL CONFLICTS

"I KNOW HIM WELL," PRESIDENT-elect George W. Bush rhapsodized about his successor, incoming Texas Governor Rick Perry, back in December 2000. "He'll be a fine governor, carrying on the tradition of bipartisanship, civility, and fair-dealing." Two years in the White House apparently did nothing to corrode those feelings of fellowship. "You're fixing to elect a good man to governor of Texas," Bush told a crowd of thousands in 2002. "That man is Rick Perry." But now, on the matter of that man's 2006 reelection bid, Bush, according to *The Austin American-Statesman*, "has declared neutrality." Apparently another Republican candidate for the office has muddied the usual presidential clarity on such issues—Texas Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn, aka the mother of White House spokesman Scott McClellan. ■

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T.A. FRANK

POLL FAULT: A striking question from the latest *Washington Post*/ABC News poll: "Do you think Democrats in Congress have gone too far or not far enough in opposing the war in Iraq?" For the record, 77 percent of Democrats and 59 percent of independents state that Democrats in Congress have not gone far enough. What on earth does it mean to say you are "opposing the war"? Does it mean you simply want to stop it—that you want to bring home all the troops tomorrow? Does it mean you want to win it—but that you remain, for the record, "opposed"? Most likely, it simply means you wish the war weren't happening and had never started. But that doesn't seem very helpful in deciding what we do now. It's as if, by "opposing" the war, the reality now unfolding can somehow be undone.

FUDGE REPORT: Of all the criticisms I've heard of the INS (or the "U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services," as it's now called)—impenetrable bureaucracy, unchecked authority, and arbitrary jailing, to mention a few—none include the claim that the agency, post–September 11, has been too *easygoing*. And, yet, on August 30, I read an ominous headline from the Associated Press: "STUDY FINDS TERRORISTS STILL EXPLOITING IMMIGRATION LAWS TO ENTER COUNTRY." The study, authored by one Janice Kephart, "former counsel to the September 11 Commission," has been released by the Center for Immigration Studies, an organization "animated by a pro-immigrant, low-immigration vision which seeks fewer immigrants but a warmer welcome for those admitted." Here's a key sentence from the conclusion of the report:

> In fact, dozens of operatives both before and after 9/11 (other than the 9/11 hijackers) have managed to enter and embed themselves in the United States, actively carrying out plans to commit terrorist acts against U.S. interests or support designated foreign terrorist organizations. For each to do so, they needed the guise of legal immigration status to support them.

Oddly enough, though, a look through the report—which includes 94 examples of terrorists making it into the country and embedding among us—reveals zero instances of terrorist hopefuls having arrived *after* September 11. (All subsequent apprehensions have been of people who were already here.) When I contacted Janice Kephart to ask if I was overlooking something, Kephart said she'd "have to go back and look." In any case, Kephart noted, the report is really "focused on what people do once they get here" and the "widespread abuse of the immigration-benefit system." Odd, then, that the report's passages on immigration benefits should also include several prominent references to border security, such as:

> What requires emphasis is the ease with which terrorists have moved through U.S. border security and obtained significant immigration benefits such as naturalization. The security gaps that existed then still, in many instances, exist today.

It's almost enough to make you think that the Center for Immigration Studies is tendentiously arranging the facts to suit an agenda. But, luckily, that would never happen in Washington.

GENERAL BROOKS: I hope I'm not the only one who wishes *New York Times* columnist David Brooks had revealed his plan to win the war in Iraq a little sooner. Drawing on the writings of counterinsurgency expert Andrew Krepinevich, Brooks explains the premise of the "oil spot" strategy:

> You set up safe havens where you can establish good security. Because you don't have enough manpower to do this everywhere at once, you select a few key cities and take control. Then you slowly expand the size of your safe havens, like an oil spot spreading across the pavement.

Of course, Brooks knew this all along:

> The fact is, the U.S. didn't adopt this blindingly obvious strategy because it violates some of the key Rumsfeldian notions about how the U.S. military should operate in the 21st century.

It's curious, but a search of Brooks's previous columns reveals no reference to the blindingly obvious strategy. In July of 2004, for instance, *other* things were obvious:

> It could be that in a month, [Iyad] Allawi and Bush will have to unleash U.S. forces. Still, stepping back, two things are obvious. This administration can adapt, and stick to a winning strategy once it finds it. Second....

Then again, perhaps we should conclude that Brooks was staying silent out of a sense that it would be inappropriate to get involved.

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Defending the war.

Dove Tale

BY JONATHAN CHAIT

AS THE SITUATION in Iraq started deteriorating last year, I kept waiting for war opponents to go after the liberal Iraq hawks. Months went by, though, and the doves appeared more interested in slapping around fatter and juicier targets like the Bush administration and its starry-eyed neoconservative backers. I started to think we might escape unscathed.

But now it's open season on liberal hawks. A recent *Nation* feature, by Ari Berman, attacks a coterie of liberal hawks who "found a way to profit from its errors, coalescing around a view that its members had been misled by the Bush Administration and that too little planning, too few troops and too much ideology were largely to blame for the chaos in Iraq." Meanwhile, the cover story in the latest *American Prospect* chides pro-war pundits as "the journalistic equivalents of Donald Rumsfeld—authors of disaster, spared from accountability, still bewilderingly in place." (The story focuses on conservatives but has a section on Thomas L. Friedman, as a proxy for liberals who crusaded for a democratizing war despite the fact that Bush had no intention of prosecuting the war as they preferred.)

Well, OK, fair enough. Given that things have not gone terribly well to date, a certain degree of humility is in order here. (In 2002 and 2003, I wrote a TNR cover story and a couple of editorials defending the war in fairly strident terms.) I'm tempted to accept the chastening and slink away. The trouble is that things aren't quite as clear-cut as the doves would have it. And more is at stake here than pundit bragging rights. The clear implication of this dressing-down is the view that the Democratic Party needs to nominate a war opponent in 2008 in particular and to stop listening to its hawkish foreign policy intellectuals in general.

Obviously, Iraq remains dangerously unstable. But, even if, for the sake of argument, we concede that the war is an abject disaster, it doesn't necessarily follow that the liberal prescription was wrong. Liberal complaints about mismanagement of the war have centered on the Bush administration's refusal to send as many troops into Iraq as the Army, and nearly any expert, thought would be necessary to carry out an orderly occupation. Could more troops have really made a *significant* difference? Yes, because, as *The New Yorker*'s Malcolm Gladwell has famously argued, sociological phenomena are often governed by "tipping points" rather than proportional returns. This is often the case with crime or other antisocial behavior, and it seems to apply to Iraq. A sufficient number of troops would likely have provided enough security to carry out reconstruction projects, which would have reduced the supply of unemployed, desperate males, which in turn would have created more political stability. Instead, Iraq has endured a vicious cycle of insecurity, failed reconstruction, economic stagnation, and political instability.

Many Iraq doves have dismissed this alternative as wishful thinking, a way for liberal hawks to transfer the blame completely onto the Bush administration and spare themselves. Yet the most prominent advocate of this view, Larry Diamond, is not only the most prominent expert on the subject (as a specialist on democracy-building who consulted with the Coalition Provisional Authority), he opposed the war in the first place. Obviously, we can't know for sure how a competently executed occupation would have fared. Yet the certainty of the doves has little to recommend it. History is filled with examples of occupations—East Timor, postwar Germany, and Japan—that had sufficient troops and did not lead to the sort of chaos endemic in Iraq.

To this, the Iraq doves reply that we hawks should have known all along that Bush wouldn't prosecute the war the way we wanted. The administration's incompetence and devotion to fighting a war on the cheap, they say, was blindingly obvious from Afghanistan, whose rebuilding had already suffered from too few resources and attention by 2003. But, I figured at the time, the invasion of Afghanistan was executed within a matter of weeks. The buildup to the Iraq war lasted far longer. And various government agencies—State, Defense, and others—had engaged in copious planning. When Bush and his mouthpieces blithely insisted the war could be waged quickly and cheaply—even though authorities like economic adviser Lawrence Lindsey and General Eric Shinseki had confessed that the war might be costly and require a quarter of a million troops—I simply thought they were lying. The administration has routinely minimized the cost of its initiatives, in order to keep deficit hawks from worrying about the size of its tax cuts. Who could have guessed that, this time, the Bushies actually believed their own propaganda? After all, the administration appeared to have an excellent grasp of its political interests, and obviously a chaotic Iraq would hurt Bush's reelection campaign. It seemed logical to me that they would do what they needed to do to safeguard their own standing.

I SHOULD PROBABLY note at this point that my argument for the Iraq war, unlike that of many liberals, did not hinge upon democratization. I wasn't sure creating a democracy in Iraq right away was feasible, and I figured that the Bush administration would settle for a stable, less repressive but still illiberal government in Baghdad. My rationale hinged upon Saddam Hussein's failure to disarm. While the weapons of mass destruction rationale has gotten an even worse rap than the democracy rationale, I still believe the logic made the most sense given what we knew at the time. Let me explain.

The truce terms of the first Gulf war called for Saddam

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His textbook on the New Testament is the most widely used in universities today. In addition to his textbook, Professor Ehrman has written dozens of book reviews and scholarly articles, and has written or edited 12 books. He was recently featured in *Time* magazine for his book *Lost Christianities.*

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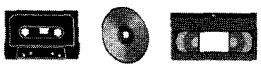

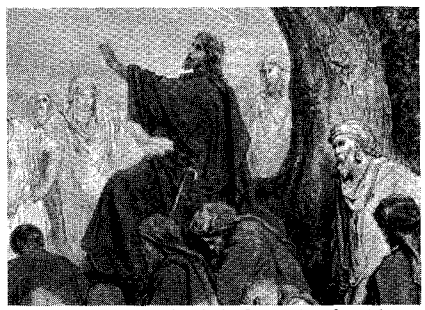

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to dismantle his weapons of mass destruction program under the watch of international inspectors. Throughout the 1990s, Saddam played a cat-and-mouse game with the inspectors, alternately extending and withdrawing cooperation, depending mostly on how much diplomatic and military pressure he faced. It reached a crisis point in 1998, when Iraq stopped cooperating altogether. In response, the Clinton administration ordered three days of bombing, but—in part due to the impeachment—essentially let the issue drop. And, yet, even as Clinton left office, the reasons for enforcing the truce terms remained compelling. Iraq under Saddam posed a major regional menace and harbored ambitions to obtain a nuclear weapon. Saddam's dreams of regional domination and history of irrational aggression suggested that allowing him to obtain such a weapon would be extremely dangerous.

Worse, containment was clearly breaking down. Iraq had successfully rebuffed international inspectors, and the will to enforce economic sanctions was rapidly eroding. As Brookings scholar and liberal Iraq hawk Kenneth Pollack notes, "The oil-for-food program was a massive sieve," allowing billions of dollars to filter up to Saddam and his henchmen. Rather than toughen the weapons inspections, the political pressure in the U.N. Security Council pushed in the direction of weakening or altogether lifting the economic sanctions. The "smart sanctions" enacted in May 2002 represented the Bush administration's attempt to retrench weakening international support—doing a better job at alleviating the suffering of Iraqis, but not doing anything to stem the flow of cash and illicit goods into Iraq.

The Bush administration recognized two basic truths. First, the cycle of threats, partial cooperation, and confrontation would simply go on forever until Iraq developed a nuclear weapon and (in Saddam's view) could no longer be deterred. Therefore, the United States had to demand full cooperation with the truce terms of the Gulf war, not salami-slicing. Second, because economic sanctions and bombings had failed to produce full cooperation, only the threat of war had any chance of compelling it. Diplomatically, this strategy unquestionably worked: By threatening to invade Iraq, the Bush administration succeeded in forcing the U.N. Security Council to demand renewed inspections.

A certain revisionism has taken root over the last couple of years as to just what those inspections achieved. As most liberals now recall it, Saddam was cooperating with the inspectors, yet Bush short-circuited the process with a precipitous invasion. Nothing of the sort happened. Saddam failed to provide a full accounting of what had happened to Iraq's unconventional weapons, denied the inspectors private interviews with scientists, and hid crucial documents in private homes. As Hans Blix, the chief U.N. weapons inspector, reported in January 2003, Iraq "appears not to have come to a genuine acceptance, not even today, of the disarmament that was demanded of it."

Subsequently, Iraq offered a greater degree of cooperation. It never fully complied, though. And, despite the fact that Blix and nuclear inspector Mohamed ElBaradei were making progress at tracking Iraq's weaponry, there is only so much you can learn without the full cooperation of the host country. (Inspectors thought they had a handle on Iraq's WMD programs in the mid-'90s, too, until Saddam's brother-in-law defected and revealed that his biological program was far more advanced than the outside world thought.) The "progress" reported by inspectors did not represent Iraq taking its final chance to completely foreswear its WMD programs. Instead, it was simply another example of Saddam strategically calibrating his level of defiance. At moments of maximum pressure, Saddam would come most of the way toward the demands of the inspectors, only to relapse inevitably when the heat was turned down. His partial compliance with Blix reflected the same strategic assumption that he could simply wait out the United States and the Security Council.

Saddam's goal was to split the Security Council and reveal the war threat as a bluff. And, when French President Jacques Chirac declared, in February of 2003, that "disarmament must happen peacefully," he revealed that it *was* a bluff. France supported tougher inspections only as a gambit to head off war. Even if Iraq did not disarm, France (and, hence, the Security Council) would never support an invasion. Had diplomacy and inspections continued, they would merely have headed back into the same cycle.

WE ALL KNOW, of course, that Iraq turned out to have abandoned its weapons of mass destruction programs. In retrospect, going to war to save the world from a nonexistent weapons program was an enormous mistake. Yet the conclusion the most radical doves take from this proves more than they think. Berman's *Nation* story acidly notes, "It's more than a little ironic that the people who got Iraq so wrong continue to tell the Democrats how to get it right." The same article concludes, "Unless and until the [pro-war] strategic class transforms or declines in stature, the Democrats beholden to them will be doomed to repeat their Iraq mistakes."

Did the doves know this all along? There *was* a smaller, fairly radical category of Iraq doves who did not share the hawks' concern about Iraq's pursuit of WMD. They include left-wing icons like George Lakoff and Michael Moore, who, unlike virtually the entire Democratic Party, opposed the war in Afghanistan as well. They see the Iraq war not as a departure from the broader struggle against terrorism but as its apotheosis. (*The Nation* would fall into this category, including Berman, who writes with evident disgust that some Democratic centrists still want "to make fighting Islamic totalitarianism the central organizing principle of the party.") Many of these leftists never accepted that Iraq posed any appreciable unconventional threat, and they can justly crow at their vindication.

And, yet, their general record of foreign policy predictions is not exactly stellar. Simply take *The Nation* as an example. Its handwringing over the Afghanistan invasion—

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"airstrikes and other military actions may not accomplish the ends we endorse and may exacerbate the situation"—seems somewhat overwrought. Its fierce denunciation of the war in Kosovo—"NATO's war on Yugoslavia has failed catastrophically"—has not worn well. And its editorial take on the Gulf war—"Sanctions have a much better chance of forcing Iraqi concessions in a shorter time and with much less misery than war. ... The death toll [from fighting] could rise to Korean War levels, or higher"—missed the mark rather badly. So perhaps the left should rethink this idea of choosing foreign policy intellectuals on the basis of their predictive accuracy.

Most Iraq doves, though, did not share the *Nation*/Moore worldview. They shared the basic assumptions of the liberal hawks. In the lead-up to war, almost nobody suggested that Iraq had completely given up its WMD programs. While U.S. intelligence agencies did not bear out the alarmist interpretation peddled by the Bush administration, they—along with the major European intelligence agencies—believed that Iraq still harbored biological and chemical weapons and a nuclear program. Ted Kennedy believed it. ("The biological and chemical weapons Saddam has are not new. He has possessed them for more than a decade.") *The New York Times* editorial page believed it. ("What really counts in this conflict ... is the destruction of Iraq's unconventional weapons and the dismantling of its program to develop nuclear arms.") There was no good reason *not* to believe it. Saddam had spent a decade thwarting weapons inspectors and paid an enormous economic price for doing so. Moreover, on two previous occasions (after the Gulf war and in 1995), Western intelligence discovered that they had been *underestimating* Iraq's WMD capability.

It's this moderate liberal critique that didn't hold together. These Iraq doves conceded that Iraq had a serious WMD program and conceded that letting Saddam acquire a nuclear weapon would be a disaster. Yet they assumed, against all evidence, that the rest of the U.N. Security Council had a good-faith interest in enforcing effective containment and that measures short of war would persuade Saddam to abandon his WMD deterrent. We now know that Saddam was so determined to keep his neighbors and his own people guessing about his WMD capability that he endured a full invasion rather than openly disarm. The moderate Iraq dove analysis, if anything, looks far worse in light of what we now know. It just happens that the moderate doves were bailed out for reasons they didn't foresee.

One way to think of it is to imagine a known murderer walking down a dark alley with his hand stuck inside his jacket. The police shout at him to put his hands up, yet he continues to walk toward them. After he ignores still more warnings, they shoot him dead, only to discover he was unarmed. Were they wrong to shoot him? Certainly they should not have shot him, but based on what they knew at the time, their decision was correct. It would be hard for those arguing to hold one's fire to make a compelling case that their advice ought to be heeded in the future. ■

We'll survive the bird flu.

Chicken Little

BY WENDY ORENT

WHEREVER YOU LOOK nowadays, you read that a deadly flu pandemic is coming. "A FLU NIGHTMARE," blared a recent editorial in *The Boston Globe*; *The New York Times* ran the breathless "WHEN A BUG BECOMES A MONSTER." Then there was the BBC's "AVIAN FLU 'COULD CRIPPLE ECONOMY'" and *Der Spiegel*'s "A TICKING TIME BOMB IN YOUR BACKYARD." *Nature*'s editors wrote, "Millions of people killed in highly developed countries within months. Tens of millions worldwide. The global economy in tatters. A Hollywood fantasy? No—it's now a plausible scenario." All of which make widespread disease, death, and general chaos seem unavoidable.

The avian influenza, or H5N1 as it is known to scientists, has sparked this attention, with press coverage painting a frightening picture. Pandemic preparations are ongoing: Tests on a new U.S. vaccine recently generated some optimism. But, since the human-to-human communicable disease it is intended to prevent does not yet exist, no one knows whether that vaccine could protect us against a real pandemic strain. Health experts are predicting the worst. Klaus Stohr of the World Health Organization (WHO) claims that seven million will die worldwide; Shigeru Omi, also of the WHO, says it's 100 million, while Russian virologist Dmitri Lvov expects one billion fatalities. Is the Big Flu coming? Judging from such predictions, it must be.

But it's not. The expert predictions don't take into account the evolutionary events necessary to turn an avian flu virus into a mass human killer. In ignoring the evolution of infectious disease, flu experts, science writers, and public health officials are leading us down the same path we've followed too many times before, with Swine Flu, Ebola, and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). Each new threat produces a new panic, whether panic is warranted or not.

THE UR-TEXTS FOR the killer-diseases-are-coming discourse are Richard Preston's *The Hot Zone* and Laurie Garrett's *The Coming Plague: Newly Emerging Diseases in a World Out of Balance*. The central idea of these books—that new infections are waiting in nature to threaten the survival of the human species—is riveting and frightening. But it's also largely offbase. As a new field called evolutionary epidemiology is

Wendy Orent, a science writer, is the author of PLAGUE.

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proving, it's not animal diseases but those adapted to humanity that cause the most trouble.

For one thing, zoonoses—diseases, such as Ebola, Marburg, or Lassa Fever, that come from animals—are typically difficult to transmit between people. These diseases generally lack the essential characteristics identified by evolutionary epidemiologist Paul W. Ewald, of the University of Louisville, as hallmarks of virulent human infections. Lethal human diseases must be either durable in the external environment (like smallpox), waterborne (like cholera), mosquito-borne (like falciparum malaria), carried by hospital workers (like multiple antibiotic–resistant staphylococcus), or sexually transmitted (like AIDS). Or they have to evolve under highly specific conditions, which we call "disease factories." For acute infections, disease factories are situations where people immobilized by illness can readily, and repeatedly, transmit that illness to the well. Most zoonoses don't have the right characteristics, or the right circumstances, to evolve into effective human pathogens.

But figuring out the evolutionary potential of new diseases, which has to be done one germ at a time, is less glamorous than proclaiming that the world is out of balance and new plagues are inevitable. Fear sells—and brings grant money. The avian flu has attracted a host of alarmists, ranging from *The Coming Plague*'s Garrett to Julie Gerberding, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), who warned the American Association for the Advancement of Science in February that bird flu "is the greatest threat we are facing." Last week, she claimed H5N1 would be showing up soon, via migratory birds, in Alaska. And, among these doomsayers, none has been more strident than former Minnesota Department of Health epidemiologist Michael T. Osterholm, now head of the University of Minnesota Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy.

In a series of articles for the *New England Journal of Medicine*, *Nature*, and *Foreign Affairs*, Osterholm threatens us with nothing less than the end of civilization. He opens the *Foreign Affairs* piece, "PREPARING FOR THE NEXT PANDEMIC," with the statement: "Dating back to antiquity, influenza pandemics have posed the greatest threat of a worldwide calamity caused by infectious disease." But to say that influenza pandemics pose a threat of "worldwide calamity" is to ignore the fact that—with the exception of the so-called Spanish flu of 1918–1919, which, reports suggest, killed 20 to 50 million people, including an estimated 675,000 Americans—no flu pandemic has been characterized by great mortality, let alone social disruption. In 1957–1958, the Asian flu sped around the world, killing perhaps 70,000 people in the United States—twice the toll of an ordinary flu year, but a long way from 1918. The next pandemic, the Hong Kong flu in 1968–1969, killed about 34,000 in the United States, fewer than the 36,000 Americans who die from flu in an ordinary year, according to the CDC. Human flu is normally a mild to moderately virulent disease: The nature of flu, transmitted via respiratory droplets, means that the virus needs to keep its host walking around, sneezing into other people's faces, and shaking their hands if it's going to spread. Compared with plague (death rates of 60 to 99 percent of those infected) or smallpox (30 to 50 percent), it's a piker. As Ewald argues, and as historian Carol Byerly's recent book *Fever of War* demonstrates, only the precise conditions of World War I's Western Front—a true disease factory—could have created a flu as virulent as the one responsible for the 1918 pandemic. With people immobilized by illness lying shoulder to shoulder beside the uninfected in trenches, trucks, trains, and ships, the normal brakes to flu virulence were off. The virus didn't need to keep people well enough to walk about—fresh victims were close at hand.

But now, Osterholm says that even the Spanish flu would be nothing compared with what awaits us next year, or next week. He forecasts that, because of population growth, the next pandemic will claim 180 to 360 million people (1.7 million in the United States alone)—and that's assuming the disease is no more lethal than the 1918 flu.

Osterholm has been on the disease and terrorism circuit for a long time. In November of 1997, he published an article in *Newsweek* stating that the smallpox virus was in the hands of several rogue states, possibly including Iraq. He briefed Jordan's King Hussein on bioterrorism: In 1999, at a symposium held by the Johns Hopkins Center for Civilian Biodefense, Osterholm said, "If there's any doubt whether Iraq has smallpox, His Majesty told me a month before he died that he knew Iraq had smallpox." This claim formed much of the basis for the Bush administration's belief that Saddam Hussein's bioweapons program had illegal stores of smallpox. "Osterholm's story had a significant impact in high places" in the run-up to war, says one administration official.

In the wake of the hysteria over West Nile virus, which entered the United States in the summer of 1999, Osterholm threatened us with deadlier mosquito-borne infections, such as Rift Valley fever, malaria, and dengue. "It's going to happen," Osterholm told a 2003 meeting of mosquito-control experts. "As water runs down a hill, it's going to happen."

It hasn't happened. There have been no large-scale lethal epidemics of mosquito-borne diseases in the United States since malaria was wiped out in the 1940s. There are two reasons for this, according to Ewald: screens and air-conditioning. "Dengue comes across the border every year from Mexico," says Ewald. "It can't take hold here." Mosquitoes can't get to us in large enough numbers to establish a human disease pool.

THERE'S NO QUESTION that H5N1 avian flu, which first emerged in Hong Kong in 1997, is a deadly disease in birds. Its virulence evolved in the crowded chicken farms and markets of Asia, where thousands of birds are packed into filthy cages—disease factories for chickens. Zoo tigers and other mammals fed contaminated meat have also died of it; ducks, who are often asymptomatic, have spread the germ through

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their feces to other water birds. With so many infected creatures across Asia, there is a lot of opportunity for people to come into contact with the virus.

A total of 112 people are known to have contracted avian flu since December 2003, and 57 have died of it—a death rate of over 50 percent. If that rate held and the disease became as transmissible as normal human flu, we would be looking at destruction worse than the Black Death, worse than any catastrophe humanity has ever witnessed.

One problem, though, is that we don't actually know H5N1's true mortality rate. We have no idea how many people in Asia contracted H5N1, came down with a mild infection, and became immune. Research from 1992 has shown that Asian chicken farmers have antibodies to many different forms of the H protein, including H5, in their blood. That's not uncommon: according to University of Ottawa molecular virologist Earl Brown, chicken farmers in North America have antibodies to bird flu strains.

And, in Asia, there are millions of chicken farmers. Prince of Songkla University physicist Sikke Hempenius, a close observer of the outbreak, points out that there are two million in Thailand alone. There are also the many abattoir women who slaughter poultry. There have been billions of chicken/human interactions over the past two years. According to Hempenius, there hasn't been a single case of H5N1 flu among chicken farmers or abattoir women in Thailand. Have they been exposed to the disease? How could they not be, with millions of infected birds all over Asia? Are they, in effect, vaccinated against H5N1? Only if massive blood surveys were carried out could we know for sure—but no one has done this work.

THE FLU CHORUS says that bird flu has only to mutate and gain transmissibility among humans to start the deadly ball rolling. In her *Foreign Affairs* piece, "THE NEXT PANDEMIC?," Garrett puts it this way: "If the relentlessly evolving virus becomes capable of human-to-human transmission, develops a power of contagion typical of human influenzas, and maintains its extraordinary virulence, humanity could well face a pandemic unlike any ever witnessed."

There is no question that the flu virus mutates rapidly; this is one of the major sources of concern by molecular virologists, many of whom feel that a chance mutation may be enough to push H5N1 into becoming transmissible from person to person. But these chance mutations would have to occur in the right context. (Mutations that happened while the virus circulates among chickens, for instance, are unlikely to matter much to the disease's human transmissibility.) As virologist Peter B. Jahrling, chief scientist at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease, says, "Mutations without selection have no consequence."

Furthermore, the panic purveyors don't seem to consider what transmissibility means from the germ's perspective: It is the way in which germs cause symptoms in the host that allows them to leave that host and infect another. With a respiratory infection, this generally means that germs must be shed in coughing, sneezing, or simply mouth-breathing. But the few autopsies that have been performed on H5N1 victims reveal virus deep in the crevasses of the lung tissues, not in the major airways, where you'd expect to find an infectious flu, according to Brown. And a recent study on health care workers in Thailand who cared for avian flu patients shows that, out of 25 workers, not one had been infected, even subclinically. Only in one case, involving a mother and daughter in Thailand, is human-to-human transmission considered probable. In other words, transmissibility among humans is more than just one random tweak of the bird flu genome away.

Even if H5N1 were to become easily communicable among humans, mass death would not follow. Our experience with the SARS coronavirus is instructive. Like avian flu, SARS emerged out of the disease cauldron in East Asia, where domestic animals, wild animals kept in cages as exotic specialty foods, and humans all exist in close proximity. Thought to be a disease of civet cats, SARS, through mutation, acquired the ability to infect human cells. Some time in late 2002, it began to spread among people. But its transmission was erratic. Most people never spread the virus at all, while some individuals, for unknown reasons, infected large numbers of people in a single instance. Even though the disease—which killed about 800 people out of around 8,000 known to have been infected—popped up in several countries around the globe, it never became a pandemic, as prompt public health measures broke the chain of transmission.

Ewald argues that the SARS virus, had it continued to spread, would have evolved to become more effective at transmission. But, by keeping its host mobile, it would also have become less virulent. By Ewald's reasoning, if avian flu starts to move from person to person, its virulence should drop, too—so long as great numbers of people immobilized by illness are not packed into close quarters with the healthy. This sort of disease factory does not exist today. Ordinary crowding won't do it. You need conditions like the Western Front in World War I to allow virulent, transmissible human flu strains to evolve.

Flu hysteria has been rising for many months now. The pandemic is no closer. Reading Garrett's article in *Foreign Affairs*, you sense she's hedging her bets. "In short, doom may loom. But note the 'may' ... nothing at all could happen. Scientists cannot predict with certainty what this H5N1 influenza will do." That is not true. Evolutionary biology tells us that the worst-case scenario—a lethal, transmissible, world-destroying flu—cannot happen, any more than Ebola or Marburg can steal out of the jungle and destroy the human race. If we have an H5N1 flu pandemic, which is certainly possible, we have no logical reason to believe it will be deadlier than the pandemics of 1957 and 1968. We do not need "a new Manhattan Project," in Osterholm's terms, to protect us from pandemic flu. We need an inoculation to protect us from disease hysterics. ■

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Halhul Dispatch

Front Line

BY MARTIN PERETZ

OK, THIS IS not really about Halhul. It is about what I saw and learned in the surroundings of Halhul, where the engineering unit of the Israeli tank battalion I visited with Colonel Bentsi has been doing reserve duty during the last weeks. It is a dangerous place. It was apparently a dangerous place long ago. It is mentioned in the Book of Joshua as a Judean town and also alluded to in 2 Samuel, where a prophet named Gad—who, according to Jewish tradition, is buried in the place—chastised David. The Bible then unforgettably records: "David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man." Pious Jews utter these words every Monday and Thursday in penitential prayers. These days, Halhul has a website dedicated to it in English and Arabic. On the English site, at least, the homepage presents its "history." Unfortunately, its truly long history is limited on the Internet to three paragraphs, each explicating the introductory sentence: "Halhul was exposed to inhumane practices by all occupation authorities since the British Mandate." Then it goes on to say, "In 1938, the British soldiers enclosed all men aged between 16 and 60 in a barbed wire compound during July—the hottest month of the year. This caused the death[s] of 15 men because of thirst and hunger." There are no citations of the Jordanian occupation from 1948 to 1967, but Hashemite rule clearly falls under the rubric "all." The bitter details of the Mandate are followed angrily by the evidently lesser depredations of the Israelis. If this is how you conceive your past, you are to be pitied not for what others did to you but for how you perceive yourselves.

The Arabs of Halhul have lived here for a millennium and a half. Have they nothing else to tell us about their history? Were there no joys in their past or accomplishments to tell? I do not want to be hard-hearted. I do not approve of collective punishment, either by the British mandatory authorities in the 1930s or, more recently, by the Israelis, who have imposed "several" curfews. But were they provoked by nothing? Of course not. Halhul and Hebron—the city that Halhul looks down upon from five miles northeast in a gentle, sloping panorama—were always centers of random violence and organized mayhem. Massacres and blood-chilling riots were the area's specialties, and many times these were imposed not on the Jews (as in 1929, when a 2,000-year-old community was expelled) or the colonial power but on one other, Arab against Arab. The hatred between the Halhulites and the Hebronites is the stuff of legend, not fabricated but all too real, a hatred that has sent many innocent folk from warring clans and tribes into their graves. This gives you a rough measure of their tolerance for death.

I VENTURED NO farther than the outskirts of this brutal place—and under the cover, I hastened to assure my family, of an Israeli gun. Bentsi, his adjutant (a Jerusalem high school principal also doing his reserves), my good friend Moshe Halbertal, and I drove on main roads and side roads in a heavily armored vehicle, the kind that U.S. forces are short of in Iraq. (I recently learned that Israel has loaned the U.S. Army there armored bulldozers and other vehicles, and it is also supplying other weaponry by commercial contract.) I sat in the "shotgun" seat but without the rifle that fits into the revolving socket inserted into the rectangular cross-hatched windshield on the right. We visited two pinched pillbox posts, one smaller than the other, where between four and six men were assigned, by rules, for 48 hours, in many cases for nearly double that time. One commanded the big road to Jerusalem, on which fire bombs are frequently thrown and other weapons rained. Sometimes, huge rocks are set in its center as a prelude to an ambush of civilian vehicles. The twilight hours were especially eerie, and they put me on edge. The other pillbox had a 360-degree assignment up the mountain and down into the valley, with a particular focus on the one road into town—population 50,000, according to one part of the website, 70,000 according to another.

The IDF is a cross-section of Israeli society. But the men in these two posts (and in the base we visited deep into night) are the elite of this sample. Not a social or economic elite, but an elite of fiber, commitment, physical strength, loyalty to comrades, and love of country. Their most striking characteristic was that they were not afraid, although they were surrounded by enemies. Their fearlessness registered in their smiles and in the music played by a pretty fancy guitarist on a rundown guitar—some Israeli pop, some American rock, some Yiddish melodies. The guitarist's family hailed, I think, from Algeria or Morocco. The ethnic and status mix and the serene sense of responsibility, sometimes expressed shyly, which cements it, were exhilarating. In one of the posts, a particularly critical responsibility fell to an Israeli Druze, a member of a heretical Shia sect that—how can I say this delicately?—hates the Palestinian Arabs, rather in the way the Israeli Circassians (a Sunni Hanafi sect, its adherents tall, fair, and blond, strong in belief but nonfanatical and very tolerant of other religions, the oldest indigenous people in the Caucusus and driven from their homeland) also hate the Arabs of Palestine. Members of both sects are known as especially courageous soldiers in the IDF, and many have won battle distinctions. They apparently know what would be in store for them if ever Israel loses a war. Other members of these units included a student of geography at the Hebrew University, a graduate student in physics at the Technion (Israel's MIT), a cleaner of sewers, a carpenter, an aeronautical engineer, et cetera.

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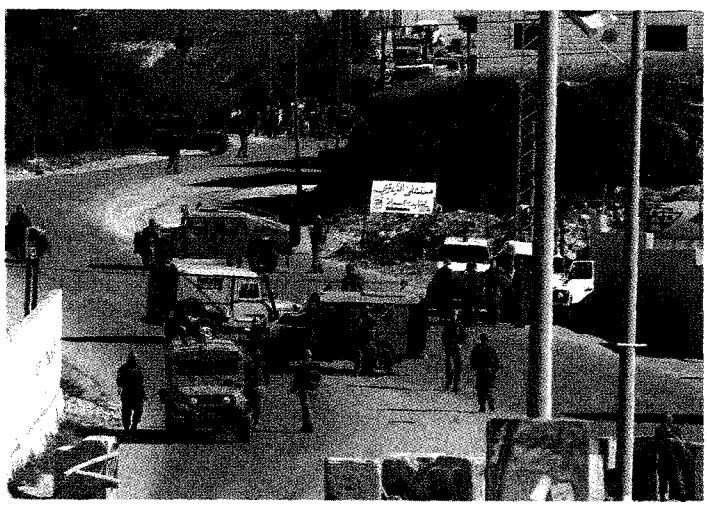
One struck me as a bit blasé, but he did not resent being in danger.

We were in the midst of three operations outside the pillboxes and the base. One was that a group of soldiers would enter Halhul and nab someone—a Hamas or an Islamic Jihad operative—for whom they had been lying in wait for some time. The second was to capture a hidden weapons cache. The third was to deter and ambush a terrorist action that was about to take place. Of course, the Israelis did not confide the real details of any of their plans to us. And we didn't ask. But these reservists were not going out to play hide-and-seek. This was serious business.

A question immediately presented itself: How did they get the information upon which they were planning their exploits? Every Palestinian knows that their society is suffused with collaborators, a fact that corrupts ordinary human discourse and ordinary human behavior. The decline in terrorist acts can be traced to three factors: the checkpoints, the fence, and the information provided by collaborators. The checkpoints inside the territories impede the movement of terrorists. The fence precludes them from entering Israeli territory. The collaborators provide information on who is planning what and when. This last is crucial, because it keeps the Israeli military informed and on the alert. The number of suicide bombings prevented by the Shin Bet, the Israeli domestic security service, or the IDF thanks to information provided by paid or afraid collaborators goes into the hundreds. Thousands of Israeli lives have thus been saved. Some "shtinkers," as the collaborators are called in the vernacular, are paid in cash. Some of them, already in prison, are allowed to see their families.

From the standpoint of Israel's security, this is not a minor asset. It also means that any piece of territory awarded to the Palestinian Authority is a forfeiture of significant military intelligence about the planned death of Israelis. In leaving Gaza, the Israeli army probably planted all kinds of listening devices that, for a time, will mute the intelligence costs of the Gaza withdrawal. (The military did not plant toxins to destroy the usability of the land, as some Palestinians have charged, either in an expression of ingrained paranoia or as a prior excuse for why they will not make a success of their farming in Gaza.) But this only delays the loss; its does not prevent it. If anyone thought that additional Israeli withdrawals would mean a genuine peace transaction with the Palestinian population, no one would worry about the loss of advanced information about terrorism: There would be no terrorism. But this, alas, this is a pipe dream.

Israeli forces block a road in Halhul, a West Bank city near Hebron, after shooting a Palestinian taxi driver who had run over and killed an IDF soldier.



NASSER SHIYOUKHI/AP PHOTO

WHERE THERE ARE collaborators, there are agents and double agents and triple agents. In Palestinian society, almost everyone pretends to be a militant, some of them simply to deflect attention from the fact that they are working confederates of the Israeli enemy. But there is a sense in which the politics of Palestine itself enables the mentality of collaboration. For, so far, Palestinian politics has been a saga of expediency, in which tactics eclipse principles and alliances are shifting and founded on narrow, short-term interests. Where there is no clear and unwavering public philosophy, opportunism flourishes. Only the Islamic fanatics (and the Marxist splinters headquartered in Damascus) are exceptions to the moral flexibility of Palestinian politics.

Even Yasir Arafat was a collaborationist of sorts. First, he adored the Soviet Union, then the United States. He said things that he didn't believe to win points with Bill Clinton, Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres, and, of course, the Western press. He was the wiliest of collaborators, never giving up anything important. Mohammad Dahlan, the Palestinian Authority minister of civil affairs, plays games with the Americans and Israelis at once, saying both things they want the Palestinians to hear and things they don't. Every so often, he will have an extremist killed and then say something that will outrage the Israelis with whom he may have negotiated the killing. Mahmoud Abbas is, in some ways, a special case. He did challenge Arafat. He spoke cordially with Ariel Sharon. He has apparently even pleased George W. Bush, especially with his talk against terrorism. He has been rewarded in many ways. But when he utters a few words against Palestinian terrorism—he has not yet taken any decisive action against Palestinian terrorism—he never proclaims that this is an inflexible principle of the Palestinian polity, a nonnegotiable matter of the highest principle. His denunciations of terrorism are like his extenuations of terrorism: They are designed for the particular situation in which he finds himself, usually to extract some concession from Jerusalem or Washington. It is not to set an example for his people, to help them learn that terrorism will destroy Palestinianism. He is a situationist; and the situationist is the cousin, and the none too distant one, of the collaborator. And, if Abbas and his comrades play this game, why shouldn't ordinary Palestinians play it, too? ■

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The Shia lobby the White House.

Side Swipe

BY SPENCER ACKERMAN

TWO WEEKS AGO, Amar Al Hakim, the son of Iraqi Shia theocrat Abdul Aziz Al Hakim, who occupies a position of enormous political influence in the ruling United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) bloc, arrived in Washington to solicit U.S. support for a radical undertaking. At a briefing for journalists and think-tankers at Freedom House's offices, the younger Hakim explained that the constitution, then being drafted by the Shia and the Kurds, needed to ensure that no legislation could "contradict with Islamic law." Many in the crowd were appalled when, as Eli Lake reported in *The New York Sun*, Hakim "fell short when trying to detail how an adherence to Islamic law could coexist with individual rights." But, if his audience left the meeting with a sinking feeling—Freedom House's Nina Shea, who has briefed President Bush personally on Iraq, warned that "the American people are not going to support a regime where rape victims are either stoned for adultery or forced to marry their rapists"—Hakim himself was unconcerned. On Islamist principles, he insisted, there would be no compromise or retreat—and the draft constitution ultimately reflected that sentiment.

But Hakim's insistence on an Islamist constitution was nowhere near as radical as another objective he pursued in Washington. The Sunnis, furious over what protest banners this week called THE ZIONIST-AMERICAN-IRANIAN CONSTITUTION, have sworn to defeat the constitution—a proxy issue for who controls Iraq—in October's ratification vote; and, by pushing the document through parliament against vociferous Sunni objections, the Shia and the Kurds have effectively dared them to. For the first time since the March 2003 invasion, Iraqi politics have cleaved along sectarian lines in a zero-sum game. It is very difficult to imagine that whichever ethno-religious faction loses the October vote will remain part of the political process. And that's where Hakim comes in. At the Freedom House briefing and elsewhere, Hakim met with a raft of influential officials—including Liz Cheney, the number-two official at the State Department's Middle East bureau and daughter of the vice president—to propose, as David Ignatius sympathetically wrote in *The Washington Post*, "a strategic alliance between Najaf and Washington." To put it less delicately, the UIA recognizes the imminence of civil war, and Hakim sought to persuade the Bush administration to support its side.

It's true that the U.S.-backed political process has already empowered the Shia majority. But to actively back a faction in a prospective civil war would push the disastrous Iraq occupation into the abyss. Not only would the United States effectively be licensing sectarian killings, but we would essentially be guaranteeing the mobilization of Iraq's five million Sunnis into a massively augmented insurgency. Even worse, a decision to explicitly support the Shia in Iraq would force the United States into a central cleavage of Islam and might prove intolerably provocative to Sunnis beyond Iraq, who make up 85 percent of the world's billion-plus Muslims—a blueprint for turning the broader war on terrorism into an unwinnable clash of civilizations. As one State Department insider delicately cautions, "Those with experience of the region know that giving more power to the Shia elbow is not very smart, but others might not understand the dangers." Unfortunately, the Bush administration has exhibited precisely such ignorance in the past.

FOR ALL THE talk from the administration about staying the course, after last week, there is increasingly little course with which to stay. Thousands of Sunnis poured into the streets to demand the rejection of the constitution. Saleh Mutlak, the embittered chief Sunni negotiator, urged the consolidation this week of an "anti-constitution front." Meanwhile, Shia counterdemonstrators have chanted, "Go die, Baathists"—meaning Sunnis. They intend to make good on the threat: Not only has the UIA's Badr Corps militia been accused of assassinating Sunnis, but smaller militias have formed to take revenge on an insurgency that has increasingly targeted Shia civilians. The constitution has put the spark to this powder keg, threatening to lead whomever loses the October vote out of the political process and into open armed conflict.

Bush's response has been to offer up new heights of unreality. At an appearance in Idaho, he called the constitution an "amazing event" and dismissed Sunni fury as "one voice." Likewise, Donald Rumsfeld equated Sunni threats with U.S. congressional debate. All this unreality is strategic. Facing up to the events of last week carries with it the implicit question of whether U.S. troops should continue to die for a fracturing country or a constitution that effectively establishes a theocracy.

And that gives the UIA an opportunity. With Bush willing to portray the disintegration of Iraq as reminiscent of America's founding, the UIA hopes to secure intensified U.S. backing by depicting itself as the standard-bearer of democracy. "If I could sum up his theme in one sentence," Ignatius wrote after meeting with Hakim, "it is that the United States should continue to bet on democracy in Iraq—which of necessity means relying on Iraq's Shiite majority and the mullahs who speak for it." The intellectual work of equating democracy with theocracy has largely been accomplished by scholars like Reuel Marc Gerecht, whose recent monograph *The Islamic Paradox* contended that there was no significant tension between Shia illiberalism and representative democracy. Fouad Ajami wrote in *U.S. News* this week that "talk of theocracy" is merely "a coded attack on the political aspirations of the Shiite majority of Iraq."

Unfortunately, those aspirations include the placement

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of clerics on a court that will interpret legislation for its compliance with Islam, a move disturbingly reminiscent of the Iranian system of clerical domination. "Religious freedom is negated by sharia, and individual rights hinge on religious freedom in a Muslim context," says Shea. The aspirations of many Shia also surely include revenge on the Sunnis for decades of domination. That suits some in the Pentagon just fine. Proponents of the so-called "Salvador option" contend that U.S. forces should be augmented by Shia and Kurdish commando squads that will attack entire Sunni villages in the name of counterinsurgency (see Jonathan D. Tepperman, "Flash Back," April 11). The prospects for the administration portraying all sorts of illiberalism and sectarian bloodshed as consistent with an inexorably advancing democracy was chillingly foreshadowed by Rumsfeld, who told soldiers at Fort Irwin on Monday, "Democracy is not perfect."

Whether Bush will ultimately embrace Hakim's proposal is uncertain. According to Gerecht, unease with the Shia exists across the administration, but, he says, "I'm sure there's receptivity" to the idea of recognizing that "we do have a real partner in Najaf." But Bush might well remember that his supposed rationale for invading Iraq is to advance the war on terrorism, which is, in no small part, about convincing millions of Sunnis worldwide that the United States is not opposed to their religion. Directly supporting the Shia against the Sunnis in Iraq is about as counterproductive to the broader war as invading Iraq itself has proved. "I'm not sure the U.S. government could or should—it certainly shouldn't—pit the Sunnis and the Shia against each other," says Richard Clarke, the former Clinton and Bush counterterrorism adviser. "Not that it's in our interest." Unfortunately, in Iraq, acting against U.S. interests is about the only thing Bush has done successfully. ■

Four years after September 11, we're still bowling alone.

American Idle

BY LAWRENCE F. KAPLAN

"WITHOUT THE COLD WAR," Rabbit Angstrom asks in John Updike's *Rabbit at Rest*, "what's the point of being an American?" Rabbit's question, which he posed in 1990, anticipated something in the national mood during the decade that followed. In 1995, social critic Christopher Lasch wrote that the United States had descended into a "democratic malaise," the most telling symptom of which, Harvard public policy scholar Robert Putnam wrote, was a decline in civic engagement. In his famous essay and then book, Putnam amassed a mountain of evidence—measuring everything from rates of church attendance to participation in bowling leagues—and pronounced that Americans were "bowling alone." A survey conducted by pollster Daniel Yankelovich in 1995 reported that Americans felt "a sickness in the very soul of society to which they cannot give a name." For conservatives especially, the '90s were wasted years, the decade's signature traits being narcissism, cultural rot, and sheer purposelessness. The coarseness of the public square "has shattered America's traditional confidence about itself, its mission, its place in the world," morality czar William Bennett wrote in *Commentary*.

Weekly Standard writer David Brooks diagnosed the condition, too. And, in 1997, he came up with a cure. In a cover story titled "A RETURN TO NATIONAL GREATNESS," Brooks echoed concerns raised by Alexis de Tocqueville nearly two

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centuries before. "Democracy has a tendency to slide into nihilistic mediocrity if its citizens are not inspired by some larger national goal," Brooks cautioned. More than anything else, his essay took aim at the trend toward civic disengagement that had been encouraged, in his telling, by the twin failures of cultural liberalism and Newt Gingrich–era conservatism. If it is to reverse this trend, Brooks elaborated, "the first task of government is to convey a spirit of confidence and vigor that can then spill across the life of the nation." The means to this end were largely beside the point. "It almost doesn't matter what great task government sets for itself," he concluded, "as long as it does some tangible thing with energy and effectiveness." With that, public figures eager to repair the civic damage of the '90s—mostly neoconservatives, but also officials in the Democratic Leadership Council orbit, Senator John McCain, and, later, certain members of the Bush team who still employ the national greatness lexicon today—struggled to devise a mission worthy of the name. And failed. Manliness, monuments, Mars—the more exotic the proposals to enhance civic vigor became, the more it became clear that what really counted was not the particular cause but its by-product.

The need for a moral equivalent of the cold war evaporated on September 11. Having failed to reverse the equation during the '90s, the architects of national greatness would henceforth make a virtue out of necessity. If most opinion-makers concentrated on the war abroad, the potential benefits at home were never far from the minds of others. Celebrating the end of America's "holiday from history," columnist Charles Krauthammer wrote that "this land of 'bowling alone,' of Internet introversion, of fractious multiculturalism developed an extraordinary solidarity. ... It turned out that the decadence and flabbiness were just summer wear, thrown off immediately." As to what awaited the United States on its return from this holiday, *Commentary* Editor-at-Large Norman Podhoretz wrote, "Beyond revenge, we crave 'a new birth' of the confidence we used to have in ourselves and in 'America the Beautiful.' But there is only one road to this lovely condition of the spirit, and it runs through what Roosevelt and Churchill called the 'unconditional surrender' of the enemy." President Bush put the point somewhat more bluntly: "For too long, our culture has said, 'If it feels good, do it.' Now, America is embracing a new ethic and a new creed: 'Let's roll.' "

The significance of national greatness was never the movement it spawned, but rather the moment it encapsulated—a minute, really, in which it was hoped that something good might come from bad. What its adherents anticipated after September 11 was really less a return to national greatness than a return to basic national goodness, a civic quality the excesses of the '90s seemed to have corroded. Civic attachments, a sense of shared purpose, a propensity to sacrifice for the common good—if historical precedent offers any guide, all of these *should* have been renewed in the aftermath of September 11. As Harvard's Theda Skocpol noted in her 2001 study, "Patriotic Partnerships: Why Great Wars Nourished American Civil Voluntarism," "America's civic vigor was greatly enhanced, both following the national fratricide of the 1860s and amidst the plunge into global conflict between 1917 and 1919." The pattern held during World War II and the cold war, conflicts that boosted everything from membership in voluntary associations to the fortunes of the civil rights movement. And, yet, not only has everything not changed since September 11; *nothing* has. According to a mountain of attitudinal and behavioral data collected in the past four years, the post–September 11 mood that former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge dubbed "the new normalcy" resembles nothing so much as the old normalcy.

That matters at home, where the toll of civic disengagement, which has ranged from the loss of community life and its benefits at the local level to the hollowing of participatory democracy at the national level, has been well-chronicled by Putnam and others. And it matters abroad, too. An erosion of the common good, after all, can easily shade into an erosion of common purpose, even more so if that purpose demands public hardship—something the war on terrorism requires.

HOWEVER INTUITIVE THE idea that September 11 ought to have sparked a return to civic engagement, the form that engagement should take is less obvious. A draft, for example, makes sense only as a response to military necessity, of which there is none today. The war in Iraq may be thinning the ranks of the all-volunteer military, but hardly to the point of requiring the conscription of tens of millions of young men—and, this time, women. Vague proposals for national service, while appealing as a means to promote social cohesion, run into the same problem. The war on terrorism doesn't require mass mobilization. Nor, in terms of civic renewal—that is, patriotism as an activity rather than merely a sentiment—should it. The vigorous citizen is not a helpless dependent awaiting a summons. That is an incompetent citizen. As political scientist Alan Wolfe puts it, "However important leaders, policies, and programs may be, greatness will not come about unless Americans care enough about it to will it into existence." For young Americans, meeting this condition could have meant at least entertaining the option of military service, a stint in law enforcement, or any number of philanthropic vocations. For others, it could have been expressed through activities as basic as volunteerism, attendance at public meetings, or membership in local organizations. For the rest of us, it could have simply been a contribution to the common good, whether through service to one's fellow citizen, one's neighborhood, or one's nation. In short, national greatness means citizens caring deeply about the fate of the nation. And, more important, acting like they do.

That so many of us seem not to has something, although not everything, to do with the quality of our leadership. Bush may employ high-minded rhetoric about America's

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purpose. But his rhetoric entails no obligation to act. The counterexample of Franklin Roosevelt has become a favorite cliché among the president's critics. And for good reason. If Bush has, in some respects, followed in the footsteps of FDR abroad, he has governed more like Warren Harding here at home. "No less than December 7, 1941," then–National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice announced in October 2003, "September 11, 2001, forever changed the lives of every American." About 1941 she was correct. As the famous World War II poster put it, REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR: WORK—FIGHT—SACRIFICE!! And Americans did. Legions volunteered to join the military (and millions more were drafted), while, on the home front, millions of others labored directly in support of the war effort. They did so, in part, because their president asked them to. In 1943, FDR declared that "Doctor New Deal has been replaced by Doctor Win the War." And, through scrap drives, rationing, war bonds, and a doubling of their tax burden, the public responded in kind. "You see those bombers in the sky," the Irving Berlin tune went, "Rockefeller helped build them and so did I. I paid my income tax today."

Ironically, as historian David Kennedy documents in his book, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945*, FDR felt "let down" by the American people. In 1943, the president complained that too many Americans were "laboring under the delusion that the time is past when we must make prodigious sacrifices." What would he make of the present era? The circumstances that required mass mobilization during World War II are, of course, not the circumstances the United States confronts today. In Bush's telling, however, the war on terrorism requires something closer to mass demobilization. "Get on board," he urged in the immediate aftermath of September 11. "Fly and enjoy America's great destination spots. Get down to Disney World in Florida. Take your families and enjoy life." As for sacrifice, the president elaborated, "I think the American people are sacrificing now. I think they're waiting in airport lines longer than they've ever had before." Nor, in the ensuing four years, has Bush asked ordinary Americans to sacrifice much of anything else.

On one of the few occasions he did—the 2002 State of the Union Address, in which Bush summoned Americans to commit 4,000 hours to volunteer work during their lifetimes—the proposal, at least to judge by static rates of volunteerism, went nowhere. Bush's national service bill, which would have expanded the ranks of AmeriCorps, never even reached the floor of Congress. Not only has the president failed to offer even a symbolic initiative along the lines of war bonds, whose purpose was mostly to create the impression of participation in a larger effort, he has failed to offer even necessary measures. Never mind AmeriCorps: Bush began the war on terrorism by opposing the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. And, with the Armed Forces pinned down in two foreign wars and starved for manpower, he has yet to devote a speech merely to urging young Americans to consider the benefits of military service.

Bush's attempt to restore normalcy in the days after September 11 derived, according to a White House official involved in the effort, from a justifiable fear of a financial crisis. But, as the days stretched into weeks, the question of national sacrifice increasingly revolved around calculations of political risk—risks that then–special adviser Karen Hughes, in particular, urged the president not to take. And, as the weeks stretched into months, political inclinations hardened into philosophical certainties, of which Bush's multiple tax cuts were the clearest symptoms. At a time when U.S. troops are fighting two land wars abroad, the decision to slash government revenue clearly illuminated the president's understanding of the role of the state. "The unstated message [of Bush's tax cuts] was that we were *not* all in this together," Putnam says, "and, whatever the economic merits or demerits of the policy, the civic implications of that policy were abominable."

The president, it turns out, has little use for the "national" in national greatness. On the one hand, for the architects of Bush's "armies of compassion" and his "4,000-hour" initiatives, it has always been an article of faith that government action, even in wartime, frustrates the growth of civil society, which must come from below. At the time of the September 11 attacks, says Bill Galston, director of the University of Maryland's Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, "You had a Tocquevillian band in the White House and people like [compassionate conservatism guru] Marvin Olasky hanging around who wanted voluntary action but no public service." On the other hand, the Republican Party of Tom DeLay and Dick Armey—and, with it, the libertarian strain exemplified in the 1994 Contract with America and in what GOP activist Grover Norquist called the "leave us alone coalition"—remains the Republican Party of, well, Tom DeLay and Dick Armey. The laissez-faire dogma evident in the administration's domestic priorities—captured most recently by White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card, who, at an event hosted by the Partnership for Public Service, wondered aloud why applicants would "even want a job with the federal government or one of our agencies"—has deprived the president of the vision and even the vocabulary necessary to urge the nation toward greatness. It is as if the Bush administration, sensing the birth of a common purpose after September 11, consciously squashed it.

BUT IS BUSH alone responsible for the stillbirth of the national greatness project? Hardly. The insistence that, but for Bush's silence, we were all prepared to search the caves of Tora Bora together is nonsense. If the United States means to renew itself, there have to be at least a few stirrings from below. There are none.

Describing the national mood of a century ago, Walter Lippmann noted that "we have changed our environment

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more quickly than we know how to change ourselves." He could just as easily have been summarizing our own predicament. If Bush has shown no inclination to foot the national greatness bill, after all, neither have most Americans. "To the extent there is a call for enduring sacrifice, people just aren't in the mood," says James Davison Hunter, a professor of sociology at the University of Virginia and author of *The Death of Character*. "Shared notions about the public good simply don't exist anymore." Those notions have been eroding for the better part of four decades. The pressures of two-career families, suburbanization, television, the demise of the World War II generation—Putnam identifies these as the long-term culprits. Whatever civic benefits September 11 may have generated were also overwhelmed by what national greatness types decried in the '90s as unchecked habits of consumption and permissiveness—the first encouraged after September 11 by economic conservatives like the president himself, the second a product of the same cultural trends from which no American with electricity remains immune. The reluctance to abide any measure that might constrain personal autonomy, the subordination of the public good to private wants, the conflation of rights and duties—in the aftermath of September 11, the combination of these yielded, at best, an uncertain commitment to the fate of the nation. And that was true even before the bitterness from the Iraq war set in—in late 2001 and early 2002, when opinion surveys were anointing Bush the most admired man in the nation and Upper West Side brownstones were still festooned with American flags.

Beginning with the ultimate gesture of sacrifice—enlisting in the Armed Forces—all the anecdotes about young Americans rushing down to their local recruiting offices in the aftermath of the September 11 add up to nothing more than a myth. In fact, military recruitment numbers during the months following September 11 actually dipped from where they were at the same time the previous year. According to Pentagon figures, between October 1, 2001, and October 1, 2002, the number of entry-level Army recruits actually shrank by 32 percent. Defense Department surveys of young Americans found that, by early 2002, even the propensity to enlist had declined to summer 2001 levels. Meanwhile, a poll by Harvard's Institute of Politics reported that, even in the immediate aftermath of September 11, large pluralities of undergraduates would evade military service if asked to serve. "There was an eagerness to punish the enemy, but it wasn't enough of a factor to motivate people who had other plans in the lives," says National Defense University's Alan Gropman. As for less exalted endeavors, the University of California's annual survey of American freshmen found that the percentage of students who either volunteered or performed community service remained static from 2000 to 2002.

Nor did the country as a whole stir itself to much greater heights than its children did. According to Tom Smith, director of the National Opinion Research Center's General Social Survey, "Virtually every measure that shot up after 9/11 declined within three to six months as it became a historical remembrance." Rates of regular volunteering never budged at all. Neither, as a survey Putnam conducted after September 11 finds, did attendance at public meetings or membership in organizations. Charitable giving, according to the annual survey Giving USA, rose slightly in 2001 before declining again in 2002. As for the popular notion that September 11 had stimulated "one of the greatest spiritual revivals in the history of America," as Pat Robertson put it, by November 2001, according to Gallup, rates of weekly church attendance had returned to exactly their pre–September 11 levels.

Attitudes about government followed the same trend lines. Gallup found that the percentage of poll respondents who trust the government to "do what is right" dropped to pre–September 11 levels in 2002. Similarly, it reported that the percentage of Americans saying the government was doing too much, which declined after September 11, had returned to its libertarian norm by 2002. A *Los Angeles Times* poll found that the percentage of Americans willing to surrender some civil liberties to curb terrorism, which stood at 49 percent in 1995 and skyrocketed to 63 percent in 2001, had settled back to 49 percent in 2002—just as other polls showed that Americans' willingness to endure airport security screenings and random ID checks had declined as well. In a September 2002 article in the academic journal *PS*, Skocpol, relying on data compiled by Putnam, compared changes in civic attitudes just after September 11 with changes in civic behavior. She found that "Americans suddenly displayed new attitudes of social solidarity and trust in government, while barely changing their patterns of civic participation."

As for predictions by national greatness theorists that America's new sense of purpose would express itself through cultural sobriety, a glimpse at the most telling barometer of all reveals that they have gotten things exactly backward. A generation's worth of survey data has demonstrated a causal link between levels of TV viewing and civic disengagement. But *what* we watch matters nearly as much as how much we watch. During the '90s, the DDB Needham Life Style survey, which tracks viewer preferences alongside civic habits, showed that viewers who imbibed the trashiest fare were the least likely to be engaged in their communities, while those who watched the news were the most involved. Alas, while the amount of television that Americans watched increased after September 11, a Pew survey released in 2002 found that the "public's news habits have been largely unaffected by the Sept. 11 attacks and subsequent war on terrorism." So what have Americans been watching since September 11? Garbage. And, to judge by the Nielsen ratings of the past four years, more of it than ever before. "As long as you eliminate that two months after September 11," says Robert Thompson, professor of television and popular culture at Syracuse University, "we were back to 'Fear Factor'; after six months, we had a celebrity boxing match between Tonya Harding and Paula Jones."

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UPDATING AMERICA'S TELECOMMUNICATIONS LAWS: WHAT'S IN IT FOR US?

Jobs, the economy and competitiveness

Today, instant communications, distance learning and previously unknown opportunities are a part of the economic landscape. Nearly 200 million Americans have digital communications, in one form or another, and almost 40 million have broadband access to the Internet. Yet, according to a recent assembly of lawmakers and experts on July 27 at the U.S. Capitol, as great as the communications revolution has been in the United States, American leadership in the global communications arena is slipping. South Koreans enjoy greater broadband access than consumers in America, where broadband was invented. Broadband speed in Japan already is as much as 500 times the average speed of broadband in the United States. Market share in the global telecommunications market is declining as competitors in Europe, Japan and China embrace more aggressive strategies. The future wealth and global competitiveness of the United States may depend on how well networked we are to one another and how fast and effectively we communicate, according to participants. The following is an edited transcript:

REMARKS BY

SEN. MARK PRYOR
(D-Ark.)

SEN. JOHN KERRY
(D-Mass.)

SEN. JOSEPH LIEBERMAN
(D-Conn.)

THE PANEL

KIM ANDERSON
Director,
National Education Association

HARRY ALFORD
President & CEO,
National Black Chamber of Commerce

ROBERT COHEN
Fellow,
Economic Strategy Institute

GEORGE KOHL
Director,
Communications Workers of America

MODERATED BY

MICHAEL CROWLEY
Senior Editor,
The New Republic

SEN. MARK PRYOR (D-Ark.): I think everybody in this room expects that in the not too distant future many of our homes will be equipped with cutting-edge technology, things like fiberoptics and [an] array of wireless capabilities and applications. And they'll entertain us, they'll educate us, they'll protect us and they'll even maybe monitor our health. Broadband is a key to this and my sense is that broadband soon will no longer be a discretionary add-on service, but it will become in many ways the platform for a wealth of commercial and social interactions. Indeed, it could be the foundation of this nation's future economic growth, productivity gains and innovative business services.

Think about police and fire departments and hospitals. In the future, they'll use broadband communications to respond more quickly and effectively to emergencies and to coordinate relief. Medical personnel will remotely monitor patients through wireless devices connected to central medical databases. Teachers will — in even the most remote schoolhouses across the nation — be able to offer students first-rate educational opportunities.

We're evolving from the 20th century into this new Internet Age, and I think we — members of Congress and we in the government — need to retool the current regulatory regime to promote new investment and also, importantly, greater consumer choice. We must retain important consumer protections and also robust enforcement. And we must ensure that our policies are as good for the early adopters as they are for people who don't even have a computer today.

SEN. JOHN KERRY (D-Mass.): Today, 35 million households enjoy broadband service, but that is nothing compared to what they're doing in South Korea and in other places. Ten years ago, there were only 25 million [people] in America who used any kind of wireless device. Today, 192 million Americans are using cell phones, PDAs, laptops, WiFi access — again, a huge improvement.

Be mindful as we think about the choices in front of us [that it's] not a level playing field in terms of some of our competitors. The important changes are not just limited to technology. The industry

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itself has undergone a massive restructuring. Businesses that never competed with each other and that we never contemplated necessarily competing with each other are, and whether it's due to differences in technology, geography or regulation, they are now in direct competition. And as a result, telecom and everything about it in this conversation is going to be fundamentally different than it was almost ten years ago.

We also have to remember that the same is true for our economy itself. The globalization of the past 10 years has transformed the rules by which nearly every American business now operates, and none of us probably have a full overlay of every single one of those rules or of how they impact everything. If we handle it right, which is critical to the committee and to all of us in Congress, this can be an enormous opportunity, and this can be a chance to be able to get competitiveness right as we go forward.

It is not hyperbole, I think, to say that the innovations still ahead of us are going to touch almost every single life, and it's going to touch every aspect of how we communicate, both in our businesses as well as in our personal lives. It's going to improve education. It's going to enhance health care services. It's going to connect small businesses to markets [that] today they don't have access to. It's going to drive productivity in the manufacturing and service sectors and it's going to give consumers greater choice in the marketplace.

But again, the conditions have to be right for that innovation and for those changes to take hold in a way that we did not foresee in 1996. All Americans have a stake in this debate. And all Americans need access to voice video and Internet services. Millions of companies large and small need a reliable network to be able to reach their customers. The reality today is that individuals and businesses cannot compete without access.

I think we also have a moral obligation to try to get this right. The reason for that is very simple. Our health care professionals are convinced that a safe system to move data from patient to doctor is going to save countless lives, as well as reduce costs. Our first responders — our law enforcement officers — know that a dependable, interoperable system to communicate in emergency situations is imperative to the security and safety of our country.

And if we expect our rural and inner-city areas to begin sharing in the prosperity, rather than seeing the gap between the haves and have-nots grow, as well as see the education gap grow, we have a moral responsibility to make sure that we don't leave them behind. The fact is that all of these stakeholders have legitimate concerns, and all of them are going to have to have a seat at the table as we proceed forward in this effort.

The success of our economy for the next 15 [to] 20 years or beyond is going to depend on what we do here and how we make these decisions. There isn't any business leader that I meet with in this country who doesn't tell me that the greatest opportunity and the greatest challenge are one and the same. It's the global economy. I agree with that. If we compete globally, we're going to succeed. If we can't compete globally, we're going to fail.

Sen. Mark Pryor:
"WE NEED TO RETOOL ... TO PROMOTE NEW INVESTMENT AND ALSO, IMPORTANTLY, GREATER CONSUMER CHOICE."

As we move forward to create a legal framework in which telecom can play this critical role, we've got to take into account the rapidly changing world. The new wave of communications-driven growth that is going to spur this growth is going to obviously be different than the first wave. And the laws that we have now, as well intended as they may have been, [are] outdated. They were almost outdated within months, if not on the date that the law was signed.

If we look at this issue through the lens of American consumers, firefighters, teachers, the folks who are in the hospitals trying to deliver health care services, EMTs responding to an emergency, entrepreneurs with new revolutionary ideas or well-intentioned businesses that want to play by fair rules in the standards of the marketplace, then I think we're going to get it right.

MICHAEL CROWLEY: Thank you to the senators for those great remarks. We can start with Robert Cohen, if you're ready to go?

ROBERT COHEN: One of the things that has happened since '96 is we've lost our strength in patent filings in communications. So as a result of the [Telecommunications Act of 1996] and some of [its] shortcomings, we're seeing a loss of technological leadership. We've lost 350,000 jobs in [the] telecommunications industry and telecommunications equipment alone. If you added a multiplier to that, we'd probably double that to something like 700,000 jobs.

So overall, directly and indirectly, the industry is probably responsible for a loss of close to a million jobs in the United States since 1996. One of the real issues here is, how do we rebuild the U.S. prowess in technology? How do we make sure we don't go through another 10 years where we have a boom and a bust?

As late as 2001, Japan realized it was not a player in terms of Internet access. The premier of Japan set up a special group within his Cabinet and put a number of policies in place, including ways of unbundling parts of a local loop that permitted a new broadband competitor to go in. There were various ways of ensuring loans and so forth if you developed a broadband network, but it also was the kind of consensus that could be reached and [an] opening for a new market.

If you look at Japan today, what a Japanese consumer is getting compared to what an American consumer is getting is almost shocking. If he's paying $30 a month for Internet service, even with DSL, or maybe it's only $20, he's getting about a couple of megs of speed. The Japanese consumer is paying a little bit more and getting 100 megs. Do you realize what that difference is?

It means that a Japanese business that wants to develop a new service, a new video service, has [the attention of] everybody in Japan — a lot of people in Japan with 100-meg access. They can start to develop [ways to take a] cell phone and

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put video in other devices, [ways to] put it on your iPod, and [ways to] put it on other devices that people haven't even bought so far.

HENRY ALFORD: In business you're either on broadband or you're dead. During last year's contentious presidential election, President Bush and Sen. Kerry both agreed on one thing. They both called for the rapid national deployment of broadband or high-speed Internet service. The candidates got it right. Despite all the press attention given to Fortune 500 corporations, small business remains the prime engine of the U.S. economy, creating two out of every three new American jobs.

One million of these businesses are owned and operated by African Americans, and 90 percent of these firms are owned and run by single individuals, lone entrepreneurs with the heart to tough it out in toe-to-toe competition with the biggest corporations in the world.

Speed makes the difference. It not only dictates how quickly one connects, but broadband also opens the way for full-motion video, almost instant downloads of complex material, rich content and interactivity.

As broadband fires up, it is going to look more and more like interactive television than the Internet. Broadband is already a reality for Fortune 500s where it promises to transform supply-chain management for the largest corporations and save big business more than $200 billion in manufacturing, inventory and transportation costs.

But even bigger benefits will come from extending the promise of broadband to small businesses in the rest of the mass market. Our country's economy and global leadership position in telecommunications hinge on having updated federal telecommunications laws immediately. Such action will create jobs, spur investment, foster innovation, expand consumer choice, enhance efficiency and increase productivity.

Legislation should be based on the fundamental belief that telecommunications markets should be driven by consumer demand, advances in technology and competition between telecommunications companies, while encouraging public interest goals. Over a five-year period, updating these laws has the potential to generate a net gain of more than 212,000 jobs, create $58 billion in new capital investment and increase the U.S. Gross Domestic Product by $634 billion.

GEORGE KOHL: [Communications Workers of America] is part of a global workers' organization, which is 2.5 million communication workers around the world. We believe we need high-speed universal networks. Second, we're interested in quality jobs; we're interested in quality service. And lastly, we want financial transparency so the game playing that's going on in financial markets in certain companies doesn't continue.

Speed is one of the things we don't think we talk enough about. We don't know how to measure it. There ought to be a way

Sen. John Kerry:
"IF WE HANDLE IT RIGHT, ... THIS CAN BE AN ENORMOUS OPPORTUNITY, AND THIS CAN BE A CHANCE TO BE ABLE TO GET COMPETITIVENESS RIGHT AS WE GO FORWARD."

— just like the airplanes leave on time or gas mileage [is clocked] — for us to measure it.

KIM ANDERSON: The real question is, what's the quality of that connection? We've all talked here about broadband and speed. What is speed? What is high speed, high capacity? That is something that's not currently being measured, and we need to measure it. Two years ago 25 percent of classrooms were still using a dialup connection.

[Imagine] you're sitting in a classroom period of 50 minutes. Fifty minutes is all a teacher has. And she's sitting there fumbling with the technology, trying to get something to download on a dialup. You can't do streaming media. You can't do rich content on a dial-up connection.

So that's one of the reasons why we definitely agree with the rest of the panel about the need for broadband and other types of high-speed, high-capacity networks out there that will enrich the learning experience and be more user-friendly for our members.

I'm going to focus primarily on E-Rate, a discount program that allows low-income schools — public and private — and public libraries access to advanced telecommunications, connectivity [and] networking. It has been wildly successful. In 1994, prior to the Telecom Act of '96, only 3 percent of our nation's classrooms were connected to the Internet, and today it's anywhere between 96 [percent] and 98 percent of classrooms.

E-Rate is actually the fourth-largest source of non-state, non-local funds that public schools receive — the fourth-largest behind Title I, IDEA — which is special education funding — [and] teacher quality. It is a huge deal for us, and our members are the beneficiaries of that program.

E-Rate is being used for distance learning. In Alaska, for example, under No Child Left Behind, students have to be taught by a highly qualified teacher, something that we greatly support. However, in Alaska, as you might imagine — it's a big, spread out state — it's hard to find [teachers who] have expertise in various subject matters to be able to put them in classrooms. So they're using distance learning and connectivity to meet that highly qualified requirement of No Child Left Behind.

It's also being used for online assessment. There's some fabulous work being done in the area of artificial intelligence, so that students who have to take state-mandated tests or locally mandated tests can do so online. They can have a diagnostic kind of test, meaning that [students] answer one question, the computer figures out what level [they're] on and then builds the rest of the test around [their] academic level.

It provides a teacher with incredibly fast [and useful] feedback to assess what instructional method is appropriate for that particular child. That's just a mind-boggling phenomenon that is now taking hold in our public school systems — and private school systems as well — that needs to be fostered, needs to be enhanced and needs to be continued, and

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we need to build on that.

Building networks through E-Rate will allow parents and teachers to e-mail one another. We think of that as just part and parcel of our day, but that is still something that needs to be employed in some areas of America, and with that kind of exchange — with a greater involvement and exchange between parents and students, and parents and teachers — and having that kind of ongoing, real-time communication can only foster and enhance the educational experience.

So all that's a short way of saying, we still need E-Rate. Why? Because we view it as not a one-time capital expenditure that was forced out of the Telecom Act of '96, but we view it as a part of the essential infrastructure of this country in terms of technology.

SEN. JOSEPH LIEBERMAN (D-Conn.): There's no doubt as to the impact modern telecommunications have had on our shared worlds of commerce and community and culture. What is in doubt is our willingness to focus on what we want to accomplish for our country, for ourselves with telecommunications in the future. And I think, again, the point here is that technology is important, obviously, but we can't just fixate on the technology. We've got to ask ourselves, what do we want the technology ideally to do for society? And the answer to that question should be the driver of development, including technological developments.

If I may take you back a few years to 1844 when Samuel FB Morse opened what might arguably be called the age of mass communication with his demonstration of the long-distance telegraph — funded, incidentally, by the federal government. His message, sent from the old Supreme Court chambers here in Washington, [D.C.,] was, "What hath God wrought," right?

He took that quote from the Book of Numbers, [Verse 23]. And had Morse known what was to come, he might have gone on to Verse 24, which said, "Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion." The modern prodigy of the now-ancient telegraph have in fact made lions of us all, capable of rising up and roaring globally via copper wire, coaxial cable, spectrum satellite, Internet protocol, and the list will undoubtedly go on.

Since the last telecommunications legislation was passed by Congress nearly a decade ago, I worry that we've been bogged down in technological discussions about how we talk to one another rather than what we need to say. For instance, because we've not focused on results as much as we should have in the past 10 years, on what we want those technologies to accomplish for us, I fear that we are not only doing the wrong thing but we're losing our technological and innovative leadership.

Presumably a goal is to increase the percentage of high-speed Internet access. I think because we've failed to focus on that kind of goal, we've not accomplished it. To me the first step to reducing the trend is to embrace the range of technologies that would make high-speed Internet access as ubiquitous as radio and television in the American household, but we've got to have the goal focused.

Sen. Joseph Lieberman: "IN THE 19TH CENTURY, MORSE DID ASK THE QUESTION: 'WHAT HATH GOD WROUGHT?' IN THE 21ST CENTURY, WE CAN NOW SEE PART OF THE ANSWER."

That's why we cannot allow the coming legislative battle over telecommunications to become, again, a contest within the industry. It's got to be focused on goals for society, for individual components [and] members of society with a quest for innovative results that will move technology forward to achieve those goals — not just to move technology forward or to benefit the various interest groups in this sector.

And that means not only considering the pursuit of new technologies but embracing the infrastructure networks of the future. The Pentagon, as you probably know, is developing a global information grid — GIG, a communications network that will enable the military to provide all of its personnel, anywhere in the world, with comprehensive, real-time, truly high-speed information about just about any situation they may confront. One day, hopefully, a similar system will exist for the rest of us.

Here are some other promising examples of where I think we need to go in a truly high-speed telecommunications world. Not only can medical care and diagnosis be a collaborative effort among doctors in remote locations, assisted by the proper communication systems, but a national network of medical records and diagnostic systems would obviously help eliminate unnecessary duplicative costs, and therefore hopefully reduce costly and often very damaging — if not fatal — medical errors.

Another example is real-time traffic management systems that could reduce congestion on our roads and highways, increasing productivity and even lowering energy costs. Another is digital sensors and telecommunications that can help us monitor electricity usage so we can save money and promote efficiency in the use of electricity.

In the 19th century, Morse did ask the question, "What hath God wrought?" In the 21st century we can now see part of the answer: a chance to both remake our world and to improve our lives and our safety in the process in ways that were unimaginable certainly when Morse experienced his breakthrough, and truly were unimaginable in the lifetimes of a lot of us. So we're at a very exciting time if we together have the foresight to impose important goals and values on what will otherwise be just the battle of titans within a field.

To view the complete transcript from the event online go to:
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True, Americans have been indulging in wartime escapism ever since the proliferation of carnivals during the Civil War. But "Fear Factor" isn't escapism. It's the hallmark of a society that feels it has nothing from which to escape.

IF HOPES FOR national greatness were never realized after September 11, they were decisively put to rest in Iraq. The extent to which greatness abroad can be transmitted to the home front depends, needless to say, on actually achieving something like greatness abroad. Who, after all, has ever heard of military defeat giving way to national renewal? The French experience in Algeria, the Soviet experience in Afghanistan, the U.S. experience in Vietnam—what these wars brought home was something else altogether. And, while the Iraq war, if only because of the small numbers of Americans fighting it, seems unlikely to introduce anything like the poison that Vietnam injected into the body politic, it certainly has done nothing to arrest the pre–September 11 trends that alarmed national greatness types in the first place. From levels of trust in the government and trust in fellow citizens to measures of public spiritedness, civic pride, and social cohesion—far from enhancing any of these metrics, post-2003 polls show that Iraq has eroded them even more.

Even if Iraq had greeted Americans with something other than bullets and roadside bombs, there was always something problematic about the idea of greatness abroad fostering greatness at home, especially in this day and age. The war on terrorism may have seemed to some like the ideal means to accomplish national renewal but for one fact: Very few Americans have any role in it. Quoting a veteran of the Second World War at the dedication of the World II Memorial last year, Bush said, "This was a people's war, and everyone was in it." But that was then. Those who most enjoy the benefits and freedoms of this country now serve it the least. There is a very simple reason for this: With the coming of an all-volunteer military in 1973—applauded at the time as a gesture of heightened moral awareness—the definition of American citizenship narrowed to the point of excluding the obligation to defend one's country. Aside from the 1.4 million men and women in the Armed Forces, their families, and members of law enforcement, virtually no one participates in today's effort.

Some national greatness critics actually tout this as progress. The portrayal of war as a means to civic renewal, after all, boasts a lousy pedigree—mostly the result of pronouncements made by intellectuals who, bored by the emptiness and trivialities of the Belle Epoque, welcomed war as something to wipe out the malaise of civilian life. (In *His Last Bow*, set on the eve of World War I, Sherlock Holmes tells his sidekick, "It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared.") In the era of mass armies, the flaw in this sort of reasoning was that, whatever war's civic effects may have been, they paled next to its carnage and certainly didn't amount to a justifiable casus belli. In terms of war's impact at home, the problem today is nearly the reverse: The ordinary American has been assigned the role of spectator, and, if surveys tell us anything, that suits him just fine.

As a result, rather than accomplishing the goals of the national greatness theorists, we have come closer to fulfilling the predictions of another conservative camp from the '90s: the pessimists. Less concerned with the effects of U.S. foreign policy here at home than they were with the impact of U.S. domestic life on its conduct abroad, these foreign policy "realists" argued during the '90s that it was inconceivable that the same Americans who had grown so complacent at home would continue to reign supreme in the international arena. In a 1997 essay in *The National Interest*, former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger wrote that the ability to sustain U.S. preeminence was "being undermined by internal weaknesses," principal among them the disintegrating "elements and the habits of mind of the American democracy." Likewise, Samuel Huntington, the eminent political scientist and *Clash of Civilizations* author, complained that "Westerners identify their civilization with fizzy liquids, faded pants, and fatty foods" and are ill-suited to great crusades.

However vituperative they may have been, the pessimists at least grasped that, in a democracy such as this one, the home front cannot be ignored. The fact is, greatness at home does not require greatness abroad, but greatness abroad *does* require greatness, or at least some level of exertion, at home. Yet the pessimists' answer, which was to accommodate and adapt U.S. foreign policy to what they saw as the degradation of American civic life, provides no adequate response to the imperatives of the war on terrorism. Hence the need to be candid about the costs and purposes of U.S. strategy: Once the demands of the war on terrorism exceed the public's readiness to sacrifice—in terms of the willingness to put even a volunteer army in harm's way or to pay the cost of what will be a decades-long enterprise—the effort will become unsustainable.

Alas, Bush still acts as though national life can somehow be compartmentalized, with a nation of couch potatoes footing the bill for ambitious foreign and military policies. Thus has the White House invited Americans to indulge in the conceit that distant wars obviate the need for broad sacrifice or the mobilization of national power. Unfortunately, the wider scope of action permitted by waging war on the cheap is illusory. The whole business reflects the administration's insistence on concealing the costs of a "hard" foreign policy from what members of the Bush team presume, with some reason, to be a "soft" American public. It was precisely this dilemma that obliged the president and his chief associates to offer assurances that any military action in Iraq would be quick and painless. Now that every American recognizes the costs, Bush has been reduced to pleading for "more sacrifice and continued resolve," as he did last week in his radio address. The time for such a request was four years ago. But it's never too late to heed. ■

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Privacies Plumbed

THE FIRST FEW MINUTES OF **JUNEBUG** are misleading. It creaks as it sets some of its characters in place. Then suddenly, almost as if a different director and cast had stepped in, the texture becomes smooth, the intent very engaging. This is the sort of film we say (or used to say) we don't often get in America, the film whose interest is not in suspense and climax but in character verity. All that *Junebug* is about is its people. And what is eventually more ingratiating, most of them are quite ordinary. The screenwriter Angus MacLachlan and the director Phil Morrison and an astonishingly perfect cast have quietly made a daring picture. Its prime purpose, without gush, is to set the seal on human commonality.

JUNEBUG
(Sony Pictures Classics)

MUSIC FROM THE INSIDE OUT
(Emerging Pictures)

Madeleine is a smart and likeable young art dealer in Chicago, lately married to George, who comes from a small town in North Carolina. Madeleine becomes interested in an eccentric elderly painter down in Carolina, who lives near George's hometown. She goes down to see the painter, George comes with her, and, since they are in the vicinity, they stay for some days with George's family. Two separate contrasts in temperament are set up: Madeleine and the slightly nutty but shrewd painter; Madeleine and George's family, who can be ticked off as homespun country folk, which is true but wonderfully insufficient.

George's father, Eugene, taciturn and erect, is at the point in life where he is willing to accept whatever ripples past him. Peg, his long-haired wife, is the sort who says she doesn't want anyone messing around in her kitchen but who, beneath the magazine mantras, is able to see, to hope, to be wounded. Their other son, Johnny, a high school dropout, taciturnly hates a lot, including his more polished brother, George. Johnny has let this discontent leak over to his wife, the very pregnant Ashley, who is blandly garrulous until she is movingly garrulous. The marvel of this picture is that the writer and director could hardly have picked a family of less immediate interest; yet, because they understand that simplicity, too, is complex, they draw us in and in.

The differences between city folk and country folk are immanent still. (George manages to belong to both species.) At the start this seems to be the theme. But the caloric humanity of Madeleine soon burns away the distance between her and George's family—most slowly with Johnny. We begin to share the silent pleasure that most of them have in their daily doings. There are two major events, Madeleine's conclusion with the painter and Ashley's childbearing, but they don't seem climactic in the conventional sense. They are just especially weighty events happening in some lives.

Reminders inevitably float up with this film. I thought of a forgotten Czech gem, *Intimate Lighting* by Ivan Passer, in which a city couple go back to visit friends in a small town. Again, nothing and a great deal happen. And the church supper scene here, the bridal shower scene, other glimpses of all the people roundabout who are simultaneously near-satire yet utterly genuine, reminded me of similar folk in Bruce Beresford's Texas poem, *Tender Mercies*.

Embeth Davidtz as Madeleine, Alessandro Nivola as George, Scott Wilson as Eugene, Celia Weston as Peg, Amy Adams as Ashley, Benjamin McKenzie as Johnny, Frank Hoyt Taylor as the painter—all of them are names that would be shameful to omit. All of them, I believe, would want to join in praise of Phil Morrison, young and not greatly experienced, who combines directorial skills with overriding faith in the rightness of what he is doing. He is fond of interpolating shots of fields and trees as brief interludes, which sometimes are more punctuation than ambiance, but Morrison's achievement here earns him the heavy burden of hope for his future.

The symphony orchestra has always seemed to me a pinnacle of civilization—a needful reassurance about the human race. When I enter a concert hall early and see the hundred or so chairs and music stands and the podium waiting there on stage, waiting for men and women to come out and make sounds that will embrace me, I feel grateful, almost as moved as I will be by the music itself. A hundred of them—just for me! I think of their pasts, their childhoods ("Seymour, put down that basketball and come practice your clarinet!"), their labor in acquiring a skill that shucks mere labor like an outgrown skin: I think that they now are men and women who breathe and dream and abide in the realm of their instruments. I want to applaud before they even come out.

Daniel Anker is a documentary maker who quite clearly shares my feelings and goes a good deal beyond. He has spent five years making a ninety-minute documentary called **MUSIC FROM THE INSIDE OUT** in which he interviews members of the Philadelphia Orchestra. "Interview" is not quite the word because we never hear him, only the players. Some of them try, before the opening credits, to answer the question, "What is music?" They give up, and the picture begins.

The subtitle is *A Musical Essay*, but that is much more formal than the film. We hear all kinds of comments—about personal satisfactions, dissatisfactions, rewards. One previous notion we are obliged to discard—at least according to what we are shown here—is that musicians in a first-class ensemble are disappointed people who wanted to be soloists. These players luxuriate in their jobs. In fact, the concertmaster, David Kim, had been an active solo violinist before he—happily, he says—joined the orchestra.

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We follow them on concert tours, several countries in Europe, plus a trip to Japan. We learn of quirks and peccadilloes. After a concert, a trombonist likes to slip into a jazz club. A horn player runs in marathons, which give him some of the exaltation of good playing. One way or another everything in their individual lives nourishes what they do and love when they are together.

Anker's film, which is dexterously edited, tells us nothing technical about playing: the tuning, the reed preparation, and so on. Not one word is ever spoken about the conductor. (Several different ones appear.) This was my one regret: I would have liked to have heard something about how musicians actually follow a conductor in a performance, since they rarely look at him.

But Anker's real success here is himself. He was obviously able to get these men and women to open up to him. And thus, quite obliquely, they remind us of a threat. As everyone knows, American symphony orchestras are in trouble. Attendance is dropping, and managements are trying various maneuvers, even stunts, to attract people. "People" means young people: symphony audiences tend to be congregations of the gray. Good luck to the orchestras, and to those young people who discover what they have been missing. Recordings are blessings, but they are not the equivalent of watching musicians play. It is scary to think of a society that will never see an orchestra play the opening chords of Beethoven's *Coriolan* overture, which are the first of the orchestral bits in the film and which launch us upward more mightily than anything in NASA. ■

JED PERL ON ART

Formalism and Its Discontents

A theory of how the art world went to hell.

I.

SOMETHING VERY STRANGE HAS happened in the past year or so. Knocking the art world has become the latest art world fashion. I am not referring to the voices of dissent that have been heard for decades from artists and critics who operate at the margins. What's going on now is that a certain disaffection and even disgust has become an insider's badge of honor, a mark of sophistication, so that artists and critics and curators who frequent the art fairs and auctions where new stars are crowned can be heard bemoaning the corruption of the scene.

Jerry Saltz, who writes for *The Village Voice*, personifies this new breed of insider disgruntlement. Writing about Damien Hirst's astonishingly amateurish photo-realist paintings, which were at the Gagosian Gallery in Chelsea earlier this year, Saltz was dead-on accurate when he observed that "they are only labels—carriers of the Hirst brand. They're like Prada or Gucci. You pay more but get the buzz of a brand." Given all the attention that was lavished on these wanly rancid snapshots of a hospital corridor, a shelf full of pills, and a drug addict's face, I can understand why Saltz thought he "heard the Drums of Destiny on the horizon" at Hirst's "glitzy after-party, in an enormous tent on the roof of Lever House—amid dancing models, reveling stockbrokers and the same successful artists and art world showboats you see at every one of these events."

Longtime critics of art world fads and fashions may be heartened to hear some of their own arguments echoed by mainstream observers. There is also something paradoxical about these ultra-clever complaints. Standing at Hirst's party, Saltz recalled "an equally decadent dinner given for Anselm Kiefer on May 1, 1993," another event where "hysteria and flagrancy filled the air," only "now it's worse." But why, if Jerry Saltz is such a critic of our rudderless art world, does he continue to go to these phony-baloney events? Since he is an art critic, not a gossip columnist, his obligation is to attend the exhibition, not the party.

What is troubling about such complaints is that they are almost exclusively focused on the social mechanisms of art: fairs, auctions, prices, publicity. Art itself hardly enters into the discussion; and when it does, the works of art are interchangeable, impersonal, of as little value in and of themselves as a pile of plastic poker chips. Everything is merely product; the art is in the deal. And the attack on the art of the deal becomes a new form of deal-making. This suggests a confusion so profound that the people who are complaining may well not have the faintest idea what is really troubling them. Beneath all the hipper-than-thou bravado, I sense a bottomless uncertainty.

Of course something has gone wrong. But far too many of the discussions about what has gone wrong begin and end with the excess of the market and the decadence of the museums, which are large, easy targets. (I have aimed and fired at them myself over the years.) What has really gone wrong is infinitely more disquieting than the corruption of the market. What we are seeing is a failure of aesthetics, a failure of artistic judgment—and its origins are deeply buried, fearfully knotted. How does taste go so bad? *That* is the real question. And any effort to answer this question forces us to turn from the parties and the deals, and focus on the matter of creativity and how it endures. We must look at the life and death of great ideas about the nature of art—and at how such cycles affect artists and audiences.

THE CENTRAL DRAMA OF OUR time is the collapse of formalism, of the belief that emotion is lodged in the very facture of the work. Formalism, which urged people to look closely and to trust the immediate evidence of their eyes, was an artistic faith—one of the greatest of all artistic faiths. Formalism offered a baseline of aesthetic experience by reducing art's power to its ABCs—to the

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relationships between lines and colors and shapes. And its eclipse is as cataclysmic as the collapse in the early twentieth century of the dream of romanticism, of the idea of the artist as the imagining individual, reshaping the world. Formalism's passing, much like the passing of romanticism, is a destabilizing force, and we must respond to it with a thoroughgoing rethinking of the very nature of art and artistic experience. But right now it is the instability that we feel all around us. Even the people who claim to be at the center of things, even the people at the parties, or some of them, recognize at least instinctively the emptiness of the situation. The rethinking has scarcely begun.

It is not easy to make sense of the death of formalism. At its best, the power of formalism—like that of all grand artistic visions—rested in its many-facetedness, in its ability to absorb contradictions, to force dissidents to clarify their ideas. The confusion of the current scene quite naturally makes us hunger for clarity, but when we consider the relative richness of the situation some decades ago and wonder how we might reclaim it, we have to recognize that true creativity rests not in the insistence on a single artistic idea but in a willingness to accept the friction between ideas. To reject formalism out of hand is as dangerous as embracing it wholeheartedly. The boldness of the greatest art is always powered by a mingling of impulses, by what might be called the ferocity of fundamentally liberal spirits. If in the nineteenth century Ingres could not help but give his classicism a feverishness that brought it within the purview of romanticism, so in the twentieth century Picasso could only create *Guernica*, a work pregnant with narrative and political allusions, by using the language of Cubism, that landmark of formalist self-reflexiveness. The power of formalism, like the power of romanticism, had to do with its being more porous, more expansive, than some of its most impassioned defenders ever dreamed.

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Formalism gave a public face to a range of concerns about the mechanics of art—about the way images are actually constructed in the studio—that had heretofore been a kind of secret knowledge, available only to artists. In earlier times, many painters and sculptors had believed that the ins and outs of studio practice were of no interest to the public; or artists feared that these technical matters could, if generally known, reduce the magical effects of art. Formalism made insiders out of outsiders. This was its democratic glory. The public that responded to Mondrian's abstractions was responding to one of the greatest revelations in the history of art, for Mondrian gave his formalist fundamentalism an astonishing imaginative power. Mondrian aimed to demystify art, to reduce it to its basics, not by stripping away the magic but by showing how much magic was inherent in a white surface and a few black lines and colored rectangles. The greatest abstractionists—Mondrian, Kandinsky, Klee—were always complicating simplicity, and this is true of the best abstraction being done today. But we can also see that what began as a revelation of studio secrets, intended to bring the audience into closer contact with the artist, could end with the near-obliteration of the studio as a place of mystery and magic.

FORMALISM'S GLORY MUST BE acknowledged, even as we acknowledge that formalism gave an imperfect explanation of artistic experience—that it failed to account for art's psychological dimensions, for how all kinds of meanings and metaphors become lodged in a work of art. Perhaps it is because some of formalism's greatest advocates were conscious of its limitations that they themselves used the word gingerly if at all. The term is most closely associated not with a movement in the visual arts but with a literary movement in early twentieth-century Russia, and if one attempts to trace its application to the visual arts the record is elusive. Clive Bell spoke of "significant form," not of formalism; and when Clement Greenberg, regarded by many as the arch-formalist, used the word in an essay published late in his life, he put it in quotation marks, as if to detach it from his own thinking.

The zenith of formalism's power came in the decades after World War II, when it dominated American universities, both the art departments and the English departments. In the mid-century years, people were eager to reject art's old relationship with religious and political authority, as well as the Marxist view of art as a reflection of economic and social forces. At cultural institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art and the New York City Ballet, the formalist doctrine—although it was in fact not always the essential animating force in the art one saw—became an open sesame for the new educated public. Theatergoers and museumgoers without any specialized knowledge felt that they could now see how the work came into being. They could enjoy the illusion of knowing what Picasso or Balanchine knew. Formalism democratized aesthetic experience—or so it seemed. Greenberg liked to say that when he traveled in Asia he was delighted to see that his responses to the quality of works of art were close to those of Asian connoisseurs, which proved to him that artistic experience was based on a universal vocabulary of form.

At the same time, there were those who complained of a growing formalist demagoguery. De Kooning was speaking to this threat when, at the Museum of Modern Art in 1951, he argued against the seductions of "pure form," and announced that no form in art was really pure. By the end of his life, Greenberg himself was insisting that the catalytic impulse in art was emotional rather than formal. Perhaps he had come to realize that any all-out attempt to pinpoint the power of art could lead to the banalization of art. If formalism's collapse is in part due to plain old philistinism—to a resentment of formalism's rage for purity—we must also admit that formalism sank from within. When I am confronted with the Color Field paintings of Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland and Jules Olitski, which Greenberg thought offered a distillation or clarification of artistic experience, I find that there is no experience left. Just as romanticism had ultimately asked too much of the autonomy of the artist, so formalism asked too much of the autonomy of the work of art. The fervor of the faith spawned absurd demonstrations of faith. If the true subject of painting was flatness and the rectangular support, why not exhibit a blank canvas? And this was not uninteresting the first or second time—but the hundredth time?

Still, for all of formalism's wild excesses, it provided—even for some of its

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most ardent detractors—the true north of an aesthetic compass. For an artist, there can be something absolutely wonderful about being able to oppose a great wrongheaded idea. With formalism gone, there is a terrifying weightlessness to the art world. And it is this sense of weightlessness, or so I believe, that explains the sense of drift and despair that has now overtaken even the upper echelons of the art establishment.

II.

FORMALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS is the central theme of art now, at the beginning of the century that follows what will forever be identified as the modern century. And as is always the case in the arts, our only true guides to the future are the artists. Yet for every artist who is actually grappling imaginatively with the whole question of formalism and its discontents, there are dozens who are adopting the dissatisfaction with formalism as a pose, a posture, a static position. That would be my verdict on the work of Neo Rauch, the German artist whose elaborate allegorical paintings, with lots of figures arrayed in curious spaces, attracted such crowds at the David Zwirner Gallery this spring. Rauch draws many of his themes—power and submission, the fascination of the picturesque, the allure of the fairy tale—from the same well of German experience that engages Anselm Kiefer and a number of other German artists keenly admired in the United States. I appreciate the sheer narrative density of Rauch's works—the curious interiors, the beguiling landscapes, the figures busy with tasks that we cannot quite make out. The trouble with his work is not that the themes remain murky; the same criticism, after all, could be lodged against certain masterpieces by Balthus. The trouble with Rauch is that the canvases remain murky *as paintings*. There is too little pleasure in the rendering of the figures, too little eloquence in the drawing; the labyrinthine structures, with their twisted perspectives and pockets of space, do not cohere, even into a dream logic. The work, in short, fails on the old formalist terms.

In the new work that strikes me as most significant, the fervor for subject, for metaphor, for narrative, for information, pushes against conventional structural solutions even as it pushes the artist toward some compelling kind of formal resolution. This paradoxical power animates the paintings and the drawings of R. B. Kitaj, as well as recent canvases by John Dubrow and Mari Lyons, all shown this past winter and spring. And it also gives some interest to the far less resolved but nevertheless diverting inventions of Ian Burns and Kirsten Hassenfeld, which were included in "Greater New York 2005," the widely discussed survey of contemporary art at P. S. 1 last spring. All of this work can be said to continue in one or another already established modern mode, and a strong argument can be made that even the dissents from formalist orthodoxy that we see here have their origins in the great modern masters. Yet there are shifts in emphasis and intonation, and these point to fundamental differences in the way that artists now approach their work.

If the rage for formal resolution was always the central animating force in twentieth-century art, it may be the case that the central drive or impulse is now the narrative or metaphorical impulse, with formal resolution—abstract power, if you will—regarded as a secondary pressure that is nonetheless essential. That the best art of the present should embrace nearly all the themes that we knew from the best art of the recent past is not surprising, for the shift from one period to another—from the late Middle Ages to the early Renaissance, or from the High Renaissance to the Baroque—is often not a shift in fundamental structures so much as a change in the attitude toward those structures. And there are certain figures—especially the French painter Jean Hélion, whose small retrospective is now at the National Academy Museum in New York—who have the rare capacity to live in one period and yet see clearly the shape of the next.

THE EXHIBITION OF NEW PAINTings and drawings by Kitaj at the Marlborough Gallery last spring was immensely exciting. Although some earlier works were included, the bulk of the more than a hundred paintings and drawings on display were completed in the last five years, and one could see how Kitaj's ferociously large gifts as a draftsman had been further enlarged in the light yet febrile power of his new painterly style, which depends on a great deal of white, punctuated by brilliant strokes of color. While the central, almost obsessive motif here was the variously entangled figures of the artist and his wife, Sandra Fisher, who died in 1994, even this constantly mutating theme could not contain Kitaj, who took off in multiple directions, exploring literary history, art history, Jewish history. This exhibition—which included portraits of Kafka and George Eliot, an interpretation of Delacroix's painting of Michelangelo in his studio, and a comic send-up of a Mondrian turned into a self-portrait of the artist—revealed Kitaj as perhaps more restless than ever before. Kitaj goes into the workrooms and storerooms of modernism and constructs from what he finds there an art rife with narrative, with literary allusions and metaphorical dimensions. And by now this work has become a sort of private emblem book from which Kitaj draws at will. It is part of his genius that he embraces this variability not as an anti-modern screed but as a variety of high-modern maximalism.

One can argue, indeed, that the key to Kitaj's achievement is a formalist idea, namely his fascination with brokenness, with disjuncture, with collage—which are, of course, classical modern values. For Kitaj—as for some of the literary figures, such as Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, to whom his modernism bears comparison—the result of this brokenness is a new kind of iconographic complication. Perhaps there is a relationship between Kitaj's idea of the openness of compositional possibilities and the principle of the "flatbed picture plane" that Leo Steinberg saw in Robert Rauschenberg's work in the 1960s. Steinberg said that for Rauschenberg the supporting surface, whether a canvas on the wall or a platform on the floor, could contain all the variegated elements that fill the artist's mind; the flatbed picture plane was, in some new, almost literal way, a mapping of the artist's imagination with all its overlaps and confusions.

The difference between Rauschenberg's Dadaist shenanigans and Kitaj's formal mastery is that Kitaj exerts a level of control that shapes the proliferating allusions. When Kitaj draws a simple profile of George Eliot—it is a magnificent work—he is inviting us to let our minds go, to think of her heroic feminism, of the complicated phenomenon of the best-selling Victorian author who stood against Victorian morals, and most of all of the legendary philo-Semite who wrote *Daniel Deronda*, for Kitaj is hot and volatile on the subject of Jewish-

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ness. All these allusions could easily derail a drawing—except that Kitaj has the graphic certainty to focus our attention. The very making of Eliot's profile contains and shapes the overload of allusions.

GENERALLY SPEAKING, KITAJ'S paintings are smaller and more lightly painted than in the past, and the effect is to bring them closer to his graphic work, while the almost festive vigor of his color locates them securely within the painter's realm. The compositions devoted to his late wife, with their white light and the two figures frequently joined to create a single, emblematic form, suggest a series of moments in some disquieting but exhilarating *pas de deux*. (Imagine Balanchine's woman-as-goddess crossed with the zaniness of Paul Taylor or Merce Cunningham.) Ritual and intimacy are overlapped and intermingled in these strange iconic images, with their winged lovers and hieratic poses. The color here, not like anything else in art, echoes the Southern California skies. Kitaj, who moved to Los Angeles from London not too long after Fisher's death, has discovered a new, sun-bleached kind of romanticism. Each artistic movement, as it dissolves, comes to resemble earlier movements, so that for Kitaj the crisis of modern art becomes an extension of romantic art. This falling back into the future is the theme of Kitaj's drawing after Delacroix's broodingly troubled vision of Michelangelo in his studio; as Kitaj contemplates Delacroix contemplating Michelangelo, the statues that surround the Renaissance titan become looming talismans of the enigmatic power of form.

If Kitaj subscribes, as many formalists do, to the belief that there is such a thing as a high art tradition, he refuses to see that tradition as inhering in general principles of structure or composition. In 1980, when he was invited to organize an exhibition at the National Gallery in London, Kitaj rejected the ideas of "ideologues like Roger Fry who mistrusted Flemish 'realism' for now shopworn twentieth century reasons." Kitaj himself remembered, as a student, being moved by Memling's work, and he saw in the faces in the work of Memling and Campin and van der Weyden "still bodies informing the compositioning impulse in art." The idea here is important, for what Kitaj is arguing is not that the structure of a work is fueled by some overarching idea of significant form, but by curious, elusive qualities—by the look on the face in a Memling, or by what Kitaj identifies as "a cast of mind, an imaginative personality which has seized the terms of a picture in ways that can surprise and engage my own nervous system." Of this exhibition at the National Gallery in London, where Kitaj gathered paintings by Cézanne, Caravaggio, Velázquez, and Titian, he observed that "the real, the formal, the natural, the symbolic, the abstract, the illustration, the mythic, the social, all the many treasures of what I call depiction fuel the great compositions in this room."

In other words, there is not one specific thing that makes a painting work. It is a mysterious confluence of things. Sure, form comes into it, but how form comes into it—what provokes or compels form or makes it convincing—is multi-faceted, ambiguous. Kitaj has in recent years referred more and more to a small group of titanic artistic masters; a second show that he organized at the National Gallery in 2001 was called "In the Aura of Cézanne and Other Masters." He has also emphasized the importance of strengthening or complicating one's imagination through a study of marginal figures, and in the essay for his 1980 show at the National Gallery he began by quoting Sickert, an extraordinary and curious artist who remains little understood in the United States. Some observers of Kitaj's recent show at Marlborough thought that they discerned, in the blunt use of a few counterposed colors, the influence of the underknown American painter Leland Bell, about whom Kitaj wrote with considerable feeling some years ago.

MOST ARTISTS QUITE NATURALLY want to engage with a grand tradition, and yet the most effective way to do so generally involves a certain degree of indirection or circumspection. I sense this happening in the paintings that John Dubrow showed at Lori Bookstein last winter. In the past Dubrow has made his admiration for Poussin and Courbet and Seurat almost too clear, through the formality of his landscapes and cityscapes, and in the elaborately architected orchestrations of color and form. If the large view of a Parisian street crowded with pedestrians in Dubrow's recent show seems to me the most accomplished of his paintings, it is in part because he is less exercised by some general idea of pictorial grandeur and tradition—by an older formal system. It is now particular elements that hold Dubrow's attention: red awnings, the play of gray branches. Incident, accident, propinquity are given a freer reign in this deft composition of grayed forms. He no longer uses his lusciously impastoed paint with his usual insistence, to carpenter some perfect structure.

Something about confronting Paris has allowed Dubrow to act more American. The painting is scrappier, less purely ambitious, and it suggests something more interesting, a connection with the unfinished business of representational painting in Northern California in the decades after World War II, something of the spirit of Richard Diebenkorn and James Weeks. One feels the effort with which Dubrow maneuvers abstract building blocks in order to construct figurative forms. And, as in the work of Diebenkorn and Weeks, there is a slight melancholy about this process, as if one were always bidding the forms to speak. This is a fraught formalism. Dubrow is less willing to paper over the confusions in his work with a glib compositional aplomb. When he just barely indicates the features on a face in his big Parisian streetscape, one feels the ambiguity involved in trying to figure out how much of the face to render. As is sometimes the case in Fairfield Porter's work, levels of representation are not only or even primarily structural or compositional questions, they become narrative and metaphorical and even ethical questions.

IT IS TRUE THAT IF PAINTERS ARE good enough, they can convince us of the importance of any subject. But it is also true that the right subject can be a provocation to a painter's technique. This is yet another fact that formalism is ill-equipped to explain. At Mari Lyons's show of still lifes at the First Street Gallery in April, I was especially held by a painting of a large bouquet of flowers set in front of a carousel horse. I don't know that Lyons's subtly animated brushwork, with strokes in closely related hues giving mobility to even the simplest plane of color, was more convincing in this canvas than in a number of others. But I felt Lyons pushing to a new kind of eloquence as she confronted the heaped paradoxes of the

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subject: the carved horse imbued with the galloping energy of an animal by Rubens; the explosive elaboration of flowers rhymed with, but also distinguished from, the painted surfaces of the horse, the very idea of a not-so-still still life.

I like this painting's literary suggestiveness. The carousel horse, which provokes thoughts of play, childhood, theatricality, illusion, also has some of the fascination of the inanimate object that suggests a metaphor of action in Kleist's great essay on puppets. The bouquet and the carousel horse is a juxtaposition so perplexing that a Surrealist might have dreamed it up, and if there is a comic dimension to Lyons's paintings, it has to do with her wanting to make this absurdist arrangement appear nearly normal. The painting is a realist account of Surrealist possibility. Having watched Lyons's work evolve over the years, I can see that she is a painter who has worked tirelessly at her craft, not so that she can find something to say everyday, but so that when she has something to say, the means to say it are at hand. That is one definition of the place of formal values in the visual arts.

The power of art, of all art, does not rest in the articulation of general principles, but in the discovery of particular facts. This is a point that Kitaj has emphasized in his writing, especially in his view of Cézanne, whom he reveres as the creator not so much of perfectly balanced still lifes and landscapes, but of the peculiarly carpentered figures in the very last *Bathers*. Of course the towering idiosyncratic visions that we associate with certain late styles are sometimes the product of a personalization of techniques that can appear, earlier in an artist's career, to be almost conventional. It may be that only the artist who has struggled with the rule book of formalism can slough it off. And the willfully eccentric gestures of young artists, no matter how beguiling, may be a weak foundation on which to erect a life's work. And yet at "Greater New York," at P. S. 1, the few things that stopped me in my walk through were not what I would call fulfilled works of art (there weren't any like that around), but exercises in formalist whimsy. Kirsten Hassenfeld's wedding cake, a lacy white paper construction festooned with paper chains and flowers and baubles, had a silly exuberance. And Ian Burns's room-sized wooden installation—with a casually carpentered car that you climbed into and then toured around a track while looking through transparent panels at an amusing cascade of shadowy images—suggested the lighthearted fun of an adolescent dreaming stuff up in the garage. I imagined an extraordinarily brainy boy familiar with Indonesian puppetry, the avant-garde shadow theater of the fin-de-siècle, and the work of Tony Oursler. I will gladly go to see Hassenfeld's and Burns's work again. At least they know the ticklish fun of making things.

I have a hunch that, for Hassenfeld and Burns, aesthetic intelligence is a free-floating intelligence—an instinct or an intuition detached from any fixed formal practice. This is the artistic equivalent of manners detached from morals. And perhaps that is the most one can hope for in an art world where formalism has by and large become a kind of sentimentality, a nostalgia for an ironclad pictorial logic that never had much to do with good painting anyway.

III.

An honest evaluation of the inadequacies of one or another formalist orthodoxy must not lead us to conclude that anything goes. Far from it. What we need now is a vigorous reconsideration of a number of earlier traditions, in which formal concerns were quite naturally integrated with many other concerns. The French art historian Robert Klein, in an interesting essay on "Form and Meaning" published in the 1950s, suggested that even in the sixteenth century a humanistic ideal of self-conscious formal resolution was challenged by what we would regard as a more romantic sense of meaning as a function of mysterious, magical energies. When form is analyzed by the old masters—in the writings of Piero, Dürer, Leonardo, Poussin—it is often the shaping of the figure as a guiding force in the painting, rather than the painting as a whole, that is discussed. And when the painting as a whole is discussed, it is frequently in terms of how a sense of three-dimensional space can be rendered on a two-dimensional surface, so that formalism (if we can call it that) becomes not an end but a means to an end.

There are certain passages in Leonardo's writings—where he speaks of the dialectical fascination of figures in combat, or draws our attention to cloud formations or stains on old walls—that are treasured by moderns because they suggest how formal thinking can generate emotional and metaphorical ideas. But nobody who has turned from the work of the Old Masters to their writings has not felt how much was left unsaid. I have always suspected that the inability of both Leonardo and Poussin to complete the treatises on which they labored was at least in part due to an awareness that they could never really explain how all the pieces of the puzzle that are a work of art are finally put together. And it is well to remember that Delacroix's journal and van Gogh's letters, while full of penetrating observations about the workings of color and shape and line, always set these explorations of the formalist possibility within wide-ranging reflections on nearly every aspect of life.

While philosophers and art historians often see the search for a unified formal expression as going back to Kant, the formalist message was mostly spread by the artists, in their work and in their observations about their work. And how that message was received often depended on how much the audience was capable of understanding about what the artists actually did. In the eighteenth century, when there was an explosion of manuals aimed to teach upper- and middle-class men and women to draw, structural questions—the construction of spaces by means of light and dark planes and so forth—were linked with the emotional possibilities of the picturesque, the beautiful, and the sublime.

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The late nineteenth-century sculptor Adolf Hildebrand's famous book, *The Problem of Form in the Fine Arts*, with its discussion of the power of planar oppositions, is believed to have had an impact on the thinking of Clive Bell and Roger Fry, and was much admired by Hans Hofmann, whose lectures in New York in turn had a profound impact on Clement Greenberg.

THERE IS A DANGER, HOWever, when ideas lodged in studio practice begin to function as a general guide to aesthetic experience. The variability of studio practice, and the great diversity of psychological factors that are always in play in the studio, work against facile conceptualization. Mondrian observed that what gave even the most idealistic approach to picture-making a throbbing particularity was the fact that the work was created by an individual, who could not help but to bring emotional colorations to the very process of producing it, of constructing it. Of course if artistic practice became depersonalized as it became a form of general aesthetic knowledge, this very depersonalization could be seen as a value, as T. S. Eliot suggested in a famous essay. But there is a paradox here, as nearly every admirer of Eliot's poetry has pointed out. For whatever Eliot may have said in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" about the impersonality of tradition, "The Waste Land," written a few years earlier, is absolutely a reflection of a particular man in a particular place at a particular time. That a poet who could express his feelings as wholeheartedly as Eliot should so downplay the significance of personal emotion suggests a deep flaw in the formalist orthodoxy.

Such problems were heatedly debated in the 1920s, when Bell and Fry were involved in a valuable back and forth with I. A. Richards. Richards called this "the intellect-versus-emotion imbroglio" in his *Principles of Literary Criticism*, a book that, despite its title, deals with the visual arts directly. Richards commented, quite rightly, that there was an air of "esoteric mystery" around an idea such as Bell's "significant form"—for the significance, which was detached from literary or metaphorical or iconographic meanings, became a kind of abstraction of emotional impact. For Richards, "the value of the experiences which we seek from the arts does not lie ... in the exquisiteness of the moment of consciousness." For Richards, the experience of art could "be described as ordinary experiences completed." So that the experience of a beautiful face in a painting is not unlike the experience of the face in nature; it is only somehow further elaborated by means of the artist's gifts. In his response to Richards in his essay on "Some Questions in Esthetics," Fry maintained that "our reaction to works of art is a reaction to a relation and not to sensations or objects or persons or events"—to a relation of forms or colors or lines. But I wonder if this really is a response to Richards, who does not reject the power of such relations, and in fact speaks at great length of the place of color in art.

The danger, we can now see, was never formalism in itself, but formalism as a kind of artistic authoritarianism. And however much we may want to see formalism as an impulse that functions dialectically within the act of creation, we must also recognize that formal values, because they are grounded in a belief in the primacy of line and color and shape, have a kind of built-in authoritarianism. The Dadaist or nihilist or anything-goes attitude that now holds sway in the art world is a reaction not only to the excesses of formalist ideology in the 1960s and 1970s but also, I think, to this deeper and more intractable level of formalist experience. For an artist to accept the imperatives of line and color and shape *and* the freedom to do with those what one will requires a spirited liberalism that confounds nearly every polemic that has dominated the art world in the past generation.

For years now I have found myself wondering why it is that the most complex artistic expressions of our time—the ones that acknowledge both formalism and its discontents—never receive the widest acceptance. Now I think I know the answer. The hard fact is that the truly liberal artistic spirit—the artist who embraces the many facets of creation, who seeks some private balance between authority and freedom—is anathema. With the end of the Age of Formalism, there has grown up a generation of curators, dealers, and collectors who, while they may find it unnerving to live without any concept of artistic authority, are unwilling to let an artist ever again lead the way.

IV.

IF THIS SOUNDS LIKE AN EXCESsively bleak view, I do not think there is any other way to explain how it is that the best recent work is almost invariably downplayed or ignored. I can certainly find no other way to explain why Jean Hélion, the French painter who died in 1987 and whose magnificent achievement now has an almost prophetic authority, remains so hopelessly misunderstood in his own country and in the United States as well. Coming of age in the 1920s and 1930s, when the debates about formalism were at their most varied and suggestive, Hélion showed that the free play of formal impulses with narrative and symbolic and literary impulses could produce an art of incalculable richness.

The small retrospective that has now come to the National Academy Museum represents approximately a third of the work that was shown in the exhibition that was at the Pompidou Center in Paris last winter. (As an accompaniment to the National Academy event, the Tibor de Nagy Gallery mounted a beautiful exhibition of drawings that spanned Hélion's entire career.) Even the Pompidou show, with some hundred works, gave an inadequate account of this career that extended from scintillatingly cool abstractions done in the 1930s through titanic multi-panel studies of modern life done in the 1960s and 1970s. And while the Pompidou show glanced over the almost Flemish detail of Hélion's realism of the 1950s and virtually ignored the easygoing portraiture and landscape painting of the 1960s, the New York presentation squanders too much space on the 1930s and bowdlerizes the career further, excluding more than a quarter-century of work. Neither Paris nor New York includes any of the canvases that Hélion did in response to the student uprisings of 1968, which comprise the most important response by a painter to political events since *Guernica*. And in New York, the telegraphic informality of his final paintings of art students and working men and lovers and city streets is presented out of context, so that they strike gallerygoers as a response to the neo-expressionism of the 1980s rather than the most recent flowering of a caricatural impulse that goes back to the Carracci and the Baroque.

When Hélion painted abstractly in the 1930s—he was friends with Mondri-

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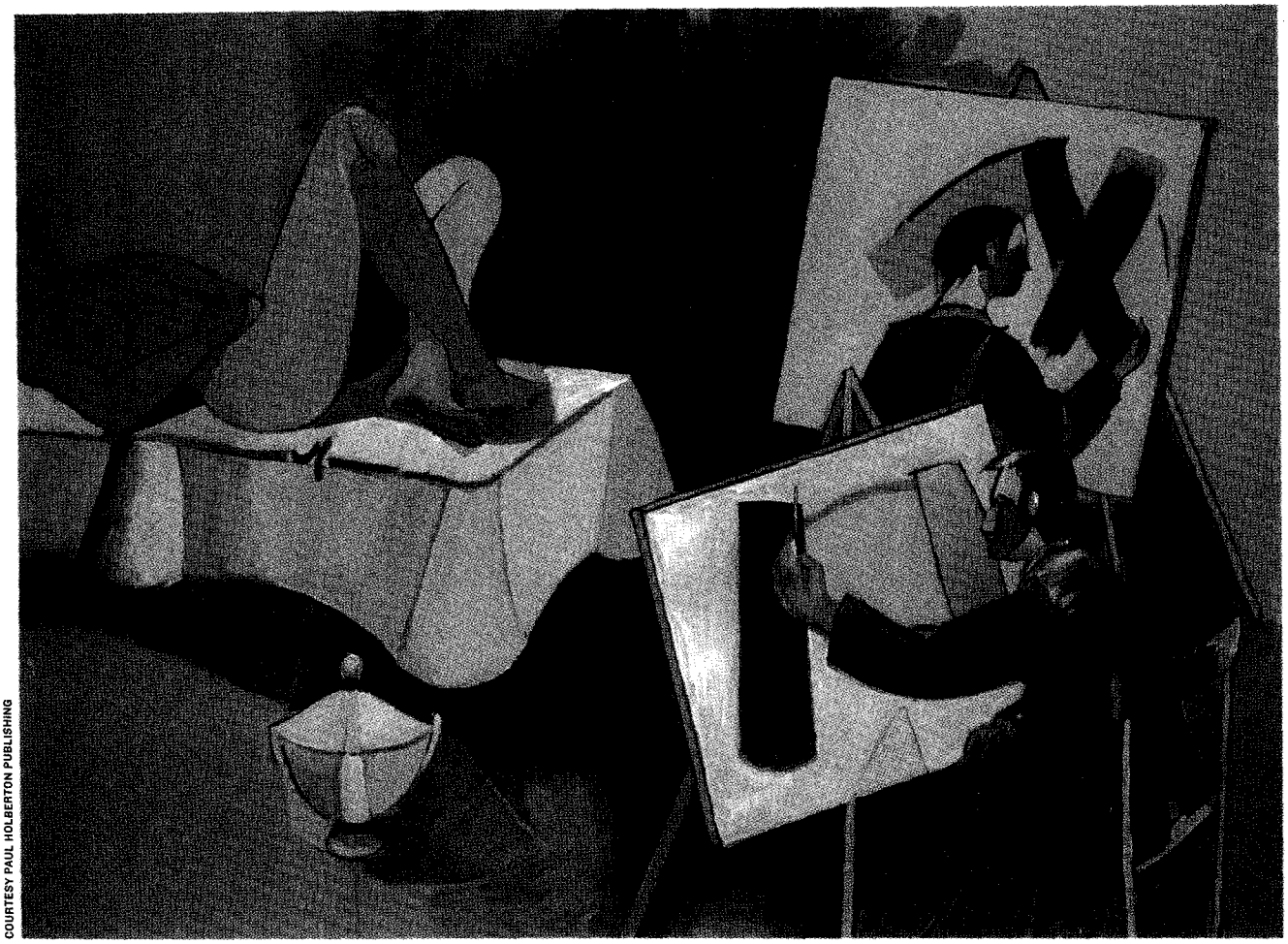

COURTESY PAUL HOLBERTON PUBLISHING

JEAN HÉLION, *The Real and the Dream*, 1979–1981

an and Kandinsky—abstraction was still in its yeasty, idealistic youth, and the formalism of these artists was so fraught with hopes and ideals that it itself became a kind of subject matter. Mondrian's verticals and horizontals, as Hélion knew full well, were as packed with implications as the elements in a Renaissance altarpiece. So when Hélion began to turn to the figure—first in the mysterious abstractions of the mid-1930s with their sphinx-like figural suggestions, and a decade later in a series of invigoratingly forthright studies of men sitting on park benches reading newspapers—it was not a rejection of formal values, but a search for pictorial situations in which an ever-increasing number of formal forces might be at play. The pinnacle of Hélion's career, and a pinnacle of the art of the last fifty years, are the triptychs, none included in New York, in which a Parisian street or flea market becomes the occasion for meditations on modern life that are rife with emblematic references: staircases and manholes as otherworldly realms, casual encounters that suggest great themes of love and loss.

In Paris the retrospective was a defining moment for Hélion, and although the French press still seems not to know what to do with this commanding figure, the crowds came. One of the perplexities of Hélion's reputation has been that, although he is of all the artists of recent years the one who has dealt most subtly and most wholeheartedly with the life of our time, he has by and large been denied the audience that might enthusiastically embrace his quotidian themes. His paintings are populist visions—in their fascination with the street, with the lives people live, with ordinary pleasures. And yet in the adventuresomeness of his color, the elaborateness of his line, and the Delacroix-esque opulence of his compositional imagination, he poses formal challenges that daunt the museum-going audience, and also the critics who now celebrate what they see as the anti-formalist populism of a Norman Rockwell. The dizzying structural complexity of Hélion's work—in the later paintings figures are built of concatenations of arcs and plays of color that are at once naturalistic and fantastic—confronts the public with multiple demands. Hélion's attitude is warm and generous and yet somehow lofty. Those who are pulled in by the modern spectacle that he depicts may be put off by the exacting formal standards that he brings to humble experiences. He gives his man-in-the-street impressions an Olympian authority, sometimes even an Olympian austerity. And this will not endear him to an art world that is fearful of superior displays of knowledge or skill.

Hélion's appearance at the National Academy is far from being the exhibition that his American admirers hunger for. I cannot really make a case for this truncated and incoherent show. Yet even those of us who imagined that Hélion would receive an indifferent reception from the powers that be have

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been shaken by Roberta Smith's barbarous dismissal of his achievement in *The New York Times*. Smith was in attack mode from her first sentence, when she announced that "those hoping to resurrect the neglected reputation of the French painter Jean Hélion have nothing to fear but Hélion himself." The review—tucked deep in the Friday art section, without any of the large color reproductions that are nowadays accorded most museum shows—was a snuff job; and the minimal amount of space given to this event was consistent with the complete lack of coverage that the *Times* has given to Hélion's last several gallery shows in New York. So I was left to wonder why it was that, if Hélion was as unimportant as Smith said he was, she felt he was in need of such a thorough trashing. If he is unimportant, why bother denouncing him as an opportunist, a conformist, a chameleon, and a misogynist? I can only conclude that Hélion's authenticity poses a threat. He just cannot be flicked off, or squeezed into a cubbyhole. Therefore he must be erased.

I DOUBT THAT HÉLION WILL EVER be received as he should be in New York, with a full retrospective at the Metropolitan or the Modern, so I must urge people to make their way to the National Academy Museum. Even in this mangled presentation, sensitive eyes will be able to glimpse a prophet for our time, a man who absorbed formalism *and* its discontents, and moved forward. What Hélion demonstrates is that formal values are neither the catalytic nor the crystallizing force in art, but are rather a constant pressure, part of a complex dialectic that is alive all through the working process and alive in the looking experience as well. The authoritarian formalists always insisted that whatever the elements that went into a work of art—subject matter, symbol, narrative—the ultimate character or quality of the work depended on their being crushed, suppressed, transcended by some unified formal experience; formal resolution was the ultimate resolution, the only one that really counted. What Hélion teaches is that far from rejecting formalism, what we must do now is embrace formalism as well as its troubles. He teaches this by example, because there is no form of abstract structure, no form of representational detail, no form of simplification, that he does not make his own.

For the artist, formal values play a vital part in a richer, far larger, and infinitely more complex equation. Looking at Hélion, it is the clarity of certain lines and colors that strikes us at one moment, and at the next moment it is the subject, the symbol, the story—and at another moment we seem to hold everything in our eyes at once. This kind of looking, with all its variety and surprise, puts immense demands on the viewer, who must be constantly making judgments, none of which is final. These are the discriminations from which so many curators and collectors and critics have now fled. We are dealing with a failure of imagination that has precipitated a failure of nerve that affects nearly everything that we are seeing in the galleries and the museums. And so we have the shattering emptiness of the Chelsea scene.

If market forces now rule, it is because the people who hold the reins of power have allowed this to happen. Obviously, the art world futures game, whatever its vagaries, is far easier to deal with than the multiplying imperatives of a formalist experience that is constantly modified by other forms of experience. But we cannot blame everything on the cultural commissars. The transformation of taste is everybody's responsibility. When the sad story of the last half-century is honestly told, we will see that several generations of gallerygoers and museumgoers were handed the keys to the artist's studio but recoiled from the obligations involved in unlocking the door and entering an alien, imaginative world. Apparently it is easier—and maybe more satisfying—to see one's own limitations mirrored in the sour surfaces of Damien Hirst. His work gives gallerygoers nothing, but it asks nothing of them, either. In the visual arts, as in so many other areas of our lives, the challenges of liberal experience have proved too much. ■

Robert Conquest
When Goodness Won

THE KGB FILE OF ANDREI SAKHAROV
Edited by Joshua Rubenstein and Alexander Gribanov
Translated by Ella Shmulevich, Efrem Yankelevich, and Alla Zeide
(Yale University Press, 397 pp., $45)

THE EVENTS OF THE LONG struggle in the Soviet Union between the despots and the "dissidents," in which Andrei Sakharov played such a great role, were well described in his *Memoirs*, which appeared in English in 1990, and in the accounts of his valiant wife, Elena Bonner. But here we have the other side of the story: the long secret records kept by the KGB and submitted to the state and party leadership. And these documents are skillfully put into the larger context by an extensive and useful introduction by Joshua Rubenstein.

The tactics and the strategy of the campaign against Sakharov were organized in detail by Yuri Andropov, who was spoken of in the West as the most intelligent and progressive of the pre-Gorbachev leaders. In fact, he was, within certain restraints, the complete apparatchik, and this book portrays him, when he was head of the KGB and later a member of the Politburo, as a cornered but unrepentant apparatchik, with the fires of Stalinism still destructively smoldering in him over the 1970s and 1980s. Some of this KGB product is couched in a comparatively cool and "objective"-sounding phraseology, apparently thought suitable in such formal papers. Here, to establish the tone, is an excerpt from Andropov's report to the Politburo on December 27, 1979: "In 1970 Sakharov created the so-called 'Human Rights Committee.' Behind the facade of the 'Committee,' Sakharov worked vigorously to consolidate antisocial elements, established and maintained contacts with foreign subversive centers, and directed the realization of extremist and provocative anti-Soviet actions."

Robert Conquest is a Fellow of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University.

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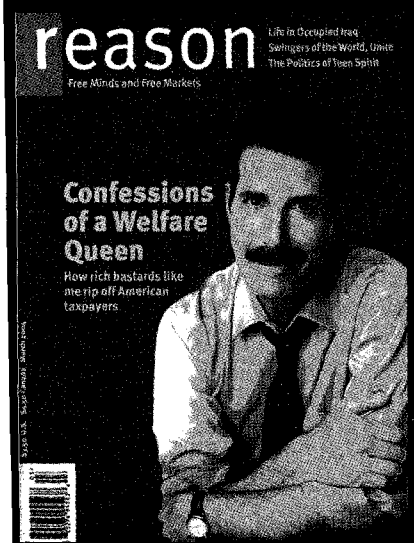
"My definition of a free society is a society where it is safe to be unpopular."

— Adlai Stevenson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In fact, these documents, revealing as they turn out to be, are probably sanitized versions. Sakharov noted about a "conversation" he had with deputy procurator general Mikhail Malyarov that the text as made public was fairly formal, whereas in reality it had been full of abuse. And in that context we note that few of these documents record anything at the level of Politburo discussions. (Michael Scammell's collection of the Politburo reports on Solzhenitsyn are revealingly full of individual leaders' remarks, often idiotically—and irrelevantly—anti-Semitic.) But the exceptions given here are striking enough, as in Foreign Minister Gromyko's remark that "all the anti-Soviet scum, all this rabble revolves around Sakharov."

WHAT THE MORE FORMAL documents lose in conventional, rabid righteousness they gain as a representation of the Soviet mind-setters, and of their ideocratic attitude to the confrontations with Sakharov and others. We are inclined to forget that the Bolsheviks were a small section of a small, and often ill-educated, segment of Russian society. Rosa Luxemburg, from the far left, warned that the Leninist program of suppressing the freedom of ideas would lead to both brutalization and stultification. She was right. The result can be seen in a volume such as this one, in the meanness and the pettymindedness of the ruling apparat.

After the imposition of this repressive order—largely by what we might now call Cheka death squads—came a more formalized terror state, inflicting on Russia a whole slew of human, intellectual, economic, and ecological disasters. But it is above all the effect of the dictatorship upon the Russian mind that has still not been fully understood in the West. As Anne Applebaum argued recently, it is important that we get this huge section of world history properly into the thinking of the West (and indeed of Russia). This book provides yet another extraordinary insight into the awful post-Stalinist heritage. Not only was genuine thought, as far as possible, destroyed, but something in the nature of Orwell's "newthink" was successfully put in its place.

From the late 1920s on, the country's politics and economy were run on the basis of what is now called "negative selection." The mental and moral degradation forseen by Red Rosa had long set in. Back in Stalin's time, the British journalist Edward Crankshaw, in *Putting Up With the Russians*, had already commented that "this is a milieu almost impossible for the foreigner to present to his own countrymen. I have had to work with such officials in war and peace. Their sycophancy, their barefaced lying, their treachery, their cowardice, are so blatant, their ignorance so stultifying, their stupidity so absolute, that I have found it impossible to convey it with any credibility to those fortunate enough never to have encountered it."

Then, in the Brezhnev period, the singer Galina Vishnevskaya—who also figures in this book, as does her husband Mstislav Rostropovich—gives a telling example. Placido Domingo once came to Moscow with La Scala and asked the culture apparat if they could arrange for Vishnevskaya to sing in *Tosca*. The Soviet official answered that she was not in Moscow. Domingo replied that he was having dinner with her that night. The official then said that she didn't sing *Tosca*. Domingo said that she had sung it with him the previous year in Vienna. An hour later the apparatchik called the Italians and said that they had spoken with her at home and she had refused. At dinner Domingo asked Vishnevskaya if they really had called and asked for her consent. No, she replied, and explained: "Don't forget, this is the Soviet Union."

ALAS, THE MENTAL HABITS OF the old Soviet apparat, the old priviligentsia, have survived the end of the Soviet regime. Corrupt oligarchy was always more deep-set than ideology in the strictest sense. The lesson seems to be that, even apart from the negative heritage of centuries past, and the mere suppression of modern ideas, it was only a matter of time for the new caste's culture to entrench itself. This is present-day Russia's fearful burden.

The population that grew up under the Soviet regime was winnowed of much of its potential. Not only were many of its best killed, but the survivors faced a mind-crushing atmosphere. Leaving aside the peasants, the military, and all the other victims, we sometimes forget how large was the number of writers, economists, scientists, and so on who also suffered. Nor do we always see fully demonstrated the degrading of various areas of thought into official idiocy, as in the notorious case of Lysenkoist biology.

How far have these lessons been learned? As I say, the question arises both in Russia itself and, in a different form, in the West. Moreover, as Joshua Rubenstein says, there has never been a "proper and thorough examination of the crimes of Stalin, of the KGB, or of the Communist Party itself." That Russia today has not come to terms with its past is obvious enough. Its celebrations of victory in World War II did not extend to confession of its own participation in the invasion of Poland in 1939, or in the forcible annexation of the Baltic states. Indeed, there has even been a move in Moscow to revoke its once-admitted responsibility for the Katyn massacre, on the grounds that the officers murdered there cannot count as victims of a "war crime." As they were specifically held in labor camps as "prisoners of war," it is hard to see this silly excuse as anything but an example of Russian re-stupefication.

QUITE IMPORTANT SECTIONS IN the West never came to understand the realities of the Soviet regime. This can be attributed, among other things, to the extraordinary notion, or rather sentiment, that the Soviet Union meant well—a position strongly held by the KGB, and firmly rebutted by Sakharov. There have been, even recently, articles in Western academic and general journals that have argued, still, that the Bolsheviks simply wished to create a better society. If that were so, it would seem peculiar that one of their first actions was to destroy other parties and movements with the same professed aims. Liberals in the Western sense, represented by the Constitutional Democratic Party, were crushed early on; but even deviant socialists, such as the Mensheviks and the Social Revolutionaries, were all, sooner or later, annihilated. The Menshevik leader Julius Martov, Lenin's old colleague and rival, was exiled in 1923 and soon died, but his relatives fell into worse trouble and, from 1936 to 1940, one brother, two sisters-in-law, three sisters, and three cousins were shot, and another brother died under interrogation. The charges against them included illegal Menshevik activity.

Another large misapprehension about the nature of the Soviet and similar regimes was that the "planned economy" meant something real. There was also, among progressives in the West,

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the idea that the "bourgeoisie" were a natural enemy of the forward-looking, adolescent intelligentsia, and that the "capitalists" were the natural enemies. There is a historical context for these sinister myths. British ambassadors to Russia in the late eighteenth century had noted that entrepreneurs had to seek the quick ruble because at any moment the state might confiscate their investments. And at the opposite pole of Russian society, the peasantry was fixed on the need to deceive the authorities to whom they were subservient—up to, and provoking, violent rural risings.

Boris Pasternak, another hero of our time, wrote that by the 1860s even the feudal Russian elements had begun to be "deeply influenced by Western ideas," and in the 1880s "came the birth of an enlightened and affluent middle class, open to occidental influences, progressive, intelligent, artistic." Unfortunately, the Russian enlightenment was opposed not merely by ancient prejudices, but also by a fresh element that had contrived to outbid it in its campaign to destroy the new Western values. Both traditionalists and progressives were abhorrent to the new Soviet regime, which proceeded to incorporate the worst features of both.

MANY RUSSIANS FOUND IT almost impossible to believe that George Orwell had never been in the Soviet Union. As the philosopher Grigori Pomerants told David Remnick, "Orwell understood the soul, or soullessness, of our society better than anyone else." What is still inadequately understood in the West is this extraordinarily low level of humanism, or even common sense, among the Soviet ruling caste. When we look at Khrushchev's role in the Cuban missile crisis, it seems incredible that the head of a great state could undertake such a ludicrously planned and incompetently executed aggression, even granting the manias of Castro and his crew.

For this reason, it is astonishing and rewarding to find—and not only in the case of Andrei Sakharov—that, in spite of all this, the inheritance of the Russian enlightenment was not totally destroyed. In part this was due to the Russian classics, which were only partly censored. If you can read Pushkin and Chekhov and Tolstoy, your mind is not fully inactivated. Even Dostoevsky was published in the Soviet Union, though in small editions and as heavily ideologized as could be managed. Dostoevsky was given an official Jubilee in 1981, when it was claimed that at last "a genuinely scientific study" had "won the battle against reaction." Until then, the Soviet press had been on the defensive, but now it was able to carry on "an active, aggressive struggle." That is, the better minds were still putting up a fight.

Sakharov, in the scientific milieu, might be thought to have been only indirectly part of the more humanist literary condition. And his thought evolved over the years. Moreover, as he put it, "I am not a professional politician. Perhaps that is why I am always burdened by doubt about the usefulness and consequences of my actions. I incline to the belief that a combination of moral criteria and unrestricted inquiry provides the only possible compass." From the apparat's standpoint, however, the emergence onto the world scene of Solzhenitsyn and Sakharov was due to extraneous or accidental causes: Solzhenitsyn, because the one decent member (or candidate member) of the central committee, Alexander Tvardovsky, persuaded Khrushchev, in an odd bit of Khrushchevian eccentricity, to have *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* published, after which the author became a politically indigestible problem; and Sakharov, as a result of his background as the leading physicist in the whole Soviet nuclear program, the recipient of all the State's highest honors and awards.

How would things have developed if there had been no Sakharov and no Solzhenitsyn? A part of the answer is that there were quite a number of heroic and unsuppressible dissidents, several of whom were tried, some of whom died in camps. A spirited and intellectual resistance was already afoot. The indomitable Vladimir Bukovsky has remarked that he and his younger generation of dissidents were delighted to witness the emergence of these older and weightier reinforcements. And the KGB documents in this volume are full of Sakharov's protests and interventions over acts against Bukovsky, Sharansky, Litvinov, and others. (It is astonishing to see that some of these individuals are, in 2005, still in their late fifties and early sixties.)

Sakharov's record, like Solzhenitsyn's, can only be seen as heroic. He undertook exhausting and much-sabotaged actions to give or show support for the unfortunate dissidents. The KGB regularly reported Sakharov's attempts to intervene at the "trials" of other dissidents. He is routinely refused admittance to the "courts" on the grounds that all the seats are taken, and is accused, with his wife, of "hooliganism" when resisting expulsion. Andropov is typically able to report to the Central Committee on Sakharov's trip to his colleague Tverdokhlebov, sentenced to exile in a distant Siberian village that denied local transportation. They had to walk twelve miles through the Arctic taiga.

A MAJOR THEME OF SAKHAROV'S writings and activities—and of other dissidents' as well—was the need to understand that the motivation of the Soviet ruling class, as seen at home, applied also to their international activities. That is, no fine words from Moscow were to be given credence in the West in the absence of any real cooperation.

Solzhenitsyn was rather against Sakharov's concentration on freedom to emigrate, taking the view that the fight for human rights within Russia was more important than the right to leave the country, and that people should stay to carry on the fight—but this was to

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miss the point that the freedom of emigration placed the whole question of Soviet oppression on an international level and involved world opinion against the oppressors.

Sakharov saw, as Koestler and others had seen earlier, that the issue of free emigration was vital to the evolution of anything like a world community. Sakharov also understood what the Soviet Union was doing in world politics. He recognized, and exposed, the mistakes of those who ran the Nixonite "détente." He understood that the Jackson-Vanik amendment, so often abused by its opponents in the West as provocative of the Soviet Union, expressed the real point—which was, of course, that if the Soviets wanted anything from the West, the West should ask for something from them. The amendment did not make any instantaneous and unacceptable demands. It sought a gradual improvement in immigration from the Soviet Union. Sakharov also strongly argued (many in the West failed to see this, too) that the concessions made by the West over SALT II might look all right, but if accepted they would be worse than useless. In 1973, Sakharov wrote that any rapprochement in which the West in effect accepted "the Soviet rules of the game" would be dangerous, and would "simply mean capitulation in the face of real or exaggerated Soviet power." He stressed that the Western approach to the Soviet Union needed to be based on a proper understanding of the motivations of the Soviet ruling caste.

Crucial to the whole dissident movement was the Helsinki Agreement of 1975, in which the Final Act required its signatories, including the Soviet Union, to "recognize the universal significance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for which is an essential factor for the peace, justice and well-being necessary to ensure the development of friendly relations and co-operation among themselves as among all States." Helsinki's "Basket Three," in more detail, was an attempt to get from the Soviets, in exchange for other concessions, an implementation of these general points and the beginning of free movement of people and ideas. The West had no other political demands. And we asked for no more than what in our own sphere we already guaranteed: communist ideas circulated freely in the West and Western citizens could move freely around the world. Nor did Western negotiators make any unreal demands for immediate and total fulfillment of these points. The terms of the agreement were "gradually to simplify and to administer flexibly the procedure for exit and entry," "to ease regulations," "gradually to lower fees for visas and official travel documents," and "gradually to increase the quantities and the number of titles of newspapers and publications."

Over the past year or so, I have noted something of a renewed tendency in the United States to praise the Nixonite "détente," and such unhelpful errors as the SALT II campaign that followed. Anyone who is thus afflicted would benefit by reading this book. The faults that Sakharov saw in some Western approaches survive to this day. Vaclav Havel, the leading intellectual and moral survivor of East European Stalinist repression, now emphasizes that "progressive" and "left" support of communist Cuba is based on the childish notion that if Castro is anti-American he is innocent of all other accusations. But as Czech diplomats following Havel have pointed out, Castro is, above all, anti-Cuban too. Havel, and other prominent resistors of East European tyrannies, such as Adam Michnik in Poland and Zheliu Zhelev in Bulgaria, powerfully emphasize that the division between left and right in the democratic countries is, or should be, as nothing compared with the division between us and the poisonous autocracies.

In the period between Brezhnev's rise to power and Gorbachev's, there came what amounted to a lost chance for the Soviet regime. With the establishment of the Dubcek government in Czechoslovakia in 1968, it looked as if some sort of liberalization might take place, not only in East Europe but in the Soviet Union itself. But the Soviet reaction was the opposite—and as Sakharov and others make clear, the re-Stalinization in Prague was accompanied by, or caused by, the same mental regression at home.

The Kremlin was now faced with a real dilemma. They wished to keep full party control of thought and speech at home, and at the same time to give an impression of open-mindedness toward the outside world. It is striking to find in these official documents the realization that the Soviet image is being damaged in the outside world—including (more often than not) the foreign communist parties, which were themselves put into a difficult position if they wished to continue their presentation of the Soviet Union as a good, or even tolerable, society. And this was at a time when, as the records now reveal, a huge monetary investment into these parties was still being made by Moscow.

One of the tactics of Brezhnevite re-Stalinization, or partial re-Stalinization, was new in Soviet life: for the first time, and formally codified, writers could now be arrested expressly for what they had written. The Sinyavsky and Daniel trial in 1966 can be seen as a truly crucial event. In Stalin's time, people writing with even the minimum of independence were not accused on those grounds. They were denounced and "tried" for espionage, terrorism, and so forth; but not explicitly for what they wrote. And in the vast majority of cases, no public report of any sort was made. In the West, or at least in the more idiotic pro-Soviet circles in the West, these things were virtually ignored—and if accompanied by a show trial, they were accepted as at most an unfortunate necessity of the regime. But now, ironically, the open persecution simply for the crime of writing with incorrect opinions could be seen for what it was by the world, and by many in the Soviet Union itself.

In 1980, Sakharov was stripped of all his state honors and sent into exile to the city of Gorky. This was done by "administrative" order—that is, without even any semblance of a trial. Gorky was a town banned to foreigners—and here again we have typical characteristics of the regime. The Gorky period is well covered in this book, from the KGB point of view. Elena Bonner, although eventually "sentenced" to a term of exile, was at first allowed to join her husband. He was there for six years, suffering endless mean-spirited provocations. He undertook several hunger strikes—as ever, in support of individuals who needed to go abroad. These included his own wife, and with great difficulty Sakharov finally obtained permission for her visits to the West for health and family reasons. More than once he was taken to a "hospital" and forcibly fed in the most degrading circumstances. The manuscripts of his memoirs were time and again stolen by the KGB—in one case while he was in a dentist's waiting room, in another case in a "search" of Elena Bonner, who was

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carrying some of the material, as the KGB happily records. In Gorky, his telephone was either bugged or cut off, and all the public telephones within walking distance were put out of action.

Well worth reading is the report by Andropov to the Central Committee on January 24, 1980, on the subject of "responses in the West to Sakharov's banishment." Andropov is able to cite ten paragraphs showing how press and diplomatic circles in the West accept Sakharov's treatment. He notes that the KGB's cutting off of his Western contacts has thus paid off.

The other innovation of the Andropov regime was the confinement of dissidents such as Bukovsky in supposed "psychiatric" hospitals under KGB control. Time and time again, mental illness is alleged against Sakharov himself, and his mental stability is discredited officially in a report by Andropov to the Central Committee: "his psychological state has clearly taken a turn for the worse. Sakharov's behavior often does not conform to accepted norms; it is excessively susceptible to the influence of those around him—above all, his wife; his behavior is patently contrary to common sense ... which allow us to regard him as a pathological personality...." In the end, he was not actually confined in this way, as were Bukovsky and others. The ploy seems to have been designed to show the West that the regime was not actually "repressing" its victims.

THE LATER SECTIONS OF THIS important book deal with the eventual recognition by Gorbachev that, in effect, Sakharov had won. The KGB reports slowly reflect the change. And in these last years we see Sakharov as a people's deputy, a political personality.

Sakharov was criticized by some of the tougher dissidents for his positive attitude toward Gorbachev. The more single-minded among them wished for no compromise whatever with the Communist regime. As always, Sakharov took what some thought of as too pragmatic a view. He saw that *perestroika*, and even more *glasnost*, however imperfect, were a vast improvement, and a basis for better things, and he told Margaret Thatcher to support them.

What Gorbachev saw, and what had not been understood for a quarter of a century by his predecessors, was that the Soviet Union simply did not work—and that what he called its "insane militarization" was not paying off. All this was finally becoming clear even to a few of the highest officials, who had long since been briefed by such accurate assessments as the confidential reports from the well-known sociologist Tatyana Zaslavskaya—for which any serious reader demonstrated impending disaster. Indeed, Gorbachev's order removing the sentence of exile and all other constraints was a triumph not only for Sakharov himself. Later, as a people's deputy, Sakharov still felt obliged to speak out publicly in opposition—and at one point an irritated Gorbachev cut off his microphone.

Elena Bonner emerges from these documents as, in the eyes of the KGB, an extremely powerful (and in our eyes, an extremely positive) figure. She is always represented as inciting him to various "anti-social" attitudes. One member of the Politburo calls her "a beast in a skirt, henchman of imperialism." One of many examples of the Soviet attitude toward travel outside the Soviet Union can be seen in a report from the KGB to the Central Committee January 23, 1984, denying Sakharov's appeal to allow Elena Bonner to travel to the West. It ends this way: "the refusal should be explained by citing Bonner's repeated violation of the rules of behavior for Soviet citizens abroad."

Attacked with especial viciousness in all the KGB documents, Bonner comes out of this long and devastating struggle magnificently. For some of us in the West, it was very touching to see her sad face on her short visits here, with her husband still detained. And it was even more affecting to behold her happiness and her merriment when she was with him, just before he died—and, indeed, to be in Moscow at a concert at the Moscow Conservatory honoring Sakharov's memory with President Gorbachev in the Royal Box having to listen to her frank remarks from the stage ("this time, Mr. President, you will not be able to turn off the microphone"), and later to go with her to a ceremony at her husband's grave. ■

Desire

God unpoured the wine out of Eve

to create delay, the gap between wanting
and the wanted.

Before, with the wine pouring through her,
desire for touch blazed simultaneous with touch, flame to flame.

My desire lags, without speech.
Mute, a weight in my eyes, a whistling cavern in my knees.

Your desire will be to your husband and he will rule over you.

God unpoured the wine out of Eve and the birds began yearning.

A woman desires her husband as the rain wants the earth
to need it, as my transgressions hope I will seek them, as God wants me to pray.

I have been told
that force has no significance. No soul moves by force.

What I want will not come to me just because I desire it.
I have been told that I cannot force.

I don't know how this will end.

God unpoured the wine out of Eve. I don't know the end to this story.

EVE GRUBIN

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WASHINGTON DIARIST

After the Flood

YOU MIGHT HAVE CALLED the very existence of New Orleans, my hometown, a triumph of hope over nature. But nature had the last say. Nestled between the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain (which spills into the Gulf of Mexico), the city's founders saw it as the perfect place for a port town. There was only one problem: The land between the river and the gulf wasn't so much land as swamp. They drained it as best they could and began to build, but it has meant a Sisyphean, 300-year death match between engineers and the elements. (The geographer Pierce Lewis called it an "inevitable city on an impossible site.") Speaking topographically, the city's doom was sealed when Jean Baptiste Le Moyne erected the first settlement there. Aside from spongy terrain, New Orleans sits below sea level. The city is shaped like a saucer; Midcity is among the lowest neighborhoods, while the French Quarter is on high ground. Even so, looking toward the Mississippi from within the Quarter, it wasn't unusual to see a tugboat looming 30 feet overhead on the other side of the levee.

THE LEVEE AND FLOOD-CONTROL SYSTEM itself represents the city's losing battle with nature. It has been built in fits and starts since 1724, and it was still not done when Katrina struck. The cost has been immeasurable, and the failures innumerable. Moreover, the section that protects against hurricane surges—begun only 40 years ago—has sunk below the height designed to bulwark against a Category Three hurricane (Katrina was nearly a Five). For decades, models have shown that, if a Category Five were ever to crawl up the mouth of the Mississippi—a scenario known to New Orleanians as "the Big One"—it could lift 25 feet of water into the saucer and leave New Orleans submerged for months. This week's cruelest irony is that New Orleans survived something like the Big One only to succumb to shoddy engineering: The city was soused the day *after* the storm, when levee collapses dumped 20 feet of water into the city. It met its demise by an act of man, not an act of God.

IT WAS ALWAYS HUBRIS TO BELIEVE WE could build a metropolis on a coastal marshland and still shield ourselves from the region's perils. But acquiescence is not the way New Orleanians contend with weather. Growing up on the Gulf Coast meant welcoming the hurricane season by stockpiling fresh water, canned food, and natural gas for the generator. Every few years, a menacing storm meant school cancelations and a road trip (east to Natchez for Andrew, west to Houston for Georges). But running from each year's near-miss—New Orleans hadn't borne a direct hit since 1965—gave us a false sense of security. Technically, we were safe in motels along the I-10 corridor, but antediluvian flight makes people believe that life as usual awaits them upon their return. Georges veered from New Orleans, wreaking its worst damage on Pascagoula, Mississippi, and prolonging this illusion. Katrina has finally, ruthlessly ended it: My family was scattered across the country this week, and we all imagined the worst. My father thought our house might break apart in the gales, then wash away in the floods. My mother believed Katrina would waterlog the family photos, which, when the storm made landfall, sat in the house's most exposed room. (We still don't know what has become of the house.) For my part, I envisioned a pool of bodies. New Orleans buries its dead above ground to prevent buoyant corpses from ascending through the dirt in heavy rain, but the floods would easily submerse the sepulchers, making it impossible for rescuers to distinguish between fatalities and recently buried bodies bobbing in the floodwater.

THIS TIME, THE EXPERTS WERE SUITABLY alarmist, too. Though the storm weakened before it made landfall and turned slightly east of New Orleans, one said, "This is so large and so powerful that it's a little bit like the difference between being run over by an 18-wheeler or a freight train." Another predicted that the floodwaters crossing the Industrial Canal would suck up benzene, chlorine, and hydrochloric acid, dousing New Orleans in a toxic soup. Both were vindicated. A third expert suggested that rising water would chase the city's remaining inhabitants up lampposts, where they would be followed, and eventually eaten, by fire ants. I can't reach anyone who stayed behind, but, given the post-apocalyptic scene unfolding, he may have been right, too. Thankfully, most residents grasped the humbling reality—that their only recourses were escape and patience—and fled. Maybe that humility is why we name storms; nobody wants to believe that the face of doom—the author of death and havoc—is just some inanimate climatic force. A tempest with agency is something we can comprehend, and it allows us to absolve ourselves and our miscalculations of some hand in the destruction.

WHY DO WE BUILD (AND PROTECT) cities that necessitate these mind games? Why did we choose to live in the shadow of pending ruin? The first reason, if you ask New Orleanians, is that risk is like the devil's music, the gothic voodoo scene, the inventive gastronomy, the insufferable weather, the debauched boozefests, the implacable corruption, the incomparable poverty, and the irredeemable football team: It sets us apart. Something primal there engendered civic pride and a sense that, if a biblical end was as near as the next low pressure system, we should live it up. It was a dysfunctional raison d'être—call it Pompeii redux—but it had its appeal. Another reason was the payoff. Despite looming annihilation, tourists flocked there from all over the world, and the port system was the largest in the Western Hemisphere. Until Wednesday, New Orleanians intuitively grasped that the risk was worth the profit and that, somehow, New Orleans worked. We lived like this, with grit, for 300 years, and we weren't going to let a little rain spoil the country's biggest party. As a result, our homes and livelihoods—and God only knows how many lives—have, overnight, ceased to exist. I am deeply ambivalent about rebuilding in that impossible place; still, acquiescence is not part of the local lexicon, and that is inevitably what residents will do anyway. Even as we return in the coming months to collect debris, New Orleanians won't move. Our triumph over the elements is imperfect, but it sure beats living in Cleveland.

ADAM B. KUSHNER

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Three Proposals for Malpractice Liability Reform

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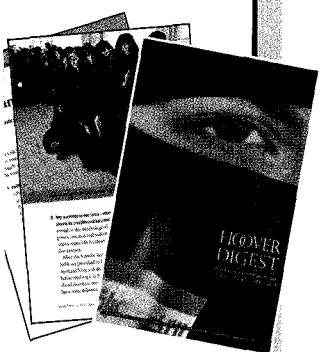

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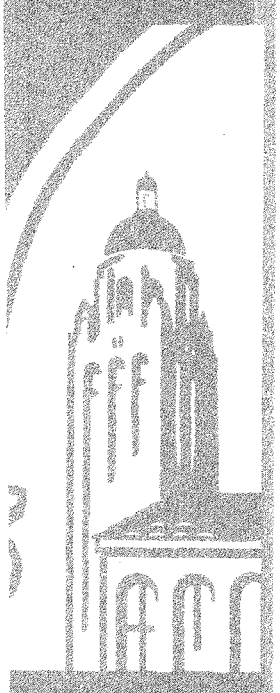

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

Last week, I argued that conventional reforms to the medical liability system such as reasonable caps on noneconomic damages reduce health-care costs and improve access to care. Although caps help, they are only part of the solution. This week, I present three other ideas for reform that offer substantial promise.

Patients and their health-care providers should be given more freedom to experiment with alternatives to the courts. Under federal law, patients and providers are supposed to be able to commit to alternative dispute resolution (ADR), in which an arbitrator resolves their cases with binding decisions. The evidence indicates that ADR compensates victims faster, more fairly, and with lower transaction costs than do the courts. ADR also can enhance incentives for doctors and hospitals to take more appropriate precautions against medical errors by replacing the current compensation lottery with a more consistent decision-making process.

Yet ADR is surprisingly uncommon. Its proponents argue that some state laws and judicial decisions make ADR agreements impossible to enforce. According to this reasoning, few agree to ADR because its decisions don't mean much. Its opponents argue that pro-doctor bias, or at least the perception of bias, is responsible for its unpopularity. According to this reasoning, patients are wary of ADR because arbitrators are more likely to favor those who pay for their services than individual plaintiffs.

Before we give up on ADR, however, we need to reform public policy to give it a chance. To give everyone more confidence in ADR, legal and regulatory reform should ensure that its decisions are both enforceable and impartial.

Data on adverse medical events collected by providers to improve the quality of care should not be admissible in malpractice cases. In general, such data are discoverable by plaintiffs, unless they fall under a state's specific statutory exception. Although this may seem to be in patients' best interests, a rule of discoverability involves a trade-off. It helps individual plaintiffs, but hurts patients as a group, by giving providers the perverse incentive to avoid learning about mistakes when there isn't a lawsuit. According to the Institute of Medicine, the costs of full discoverability exceed the benefits; reforming the rule will enhance providers' incentives to reduce the number of medical errors. Congress and several state legislatures have considered such reforms; they should adopt them immediately.

It should be easier to use clinical practice guidelines in malpractice trials. In general, procedural legal rules limit the use of guidelines—written statements of what constitutes appropriate care—as evidence. One possible reform would allow compliance with a guideline to be used as a defense against a charge of malpractice; another reform would allow failure to comply with a guideline, without a patient's written permission, to be used as evidence of malpractice.

Allowing guidelines to be used in court solves two problems. First, it would make trials more predictable. Second, expanding the role of guidelines would alert providers (and patients) to "best medical practices," which our health-care system desperately needs to do.

—Daniel P. Kessler

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